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Beginning
A New Novel
by
PERCIVAL C. WREN
Author of
BEAU GESTE

How a *Faux Pas* Made Me Popular

I never knew it was so easy to be popular until a humiliating experience showed me the secret

THE day I met Grace we went swimming. There was another chap along — Harry something — a dapper, grinning fellow with his hair slicked back. He was awkward in the water and his bathing suit hung about him like a wet sack. I didn't see how Grace could stand him.

My Fatal Mistake

That night at the hotel dance I learned a lesson. The first couple that caught my eye was Grace and Harry—but what a different Harry! His slick hair and dapper manner seemed to fit the picture perfectly. And how easily—how faultlessly he danced!

"Aren't you going to ask me to dance?" Grace called gaily to me.

I flushed, realizing I couldn't dance a step. "Why, I—I'd love to, but——"

"All right," Grace broke in, "the next dance is yours."

Before I could speak the orchestra started to play—a dreamy oriental tune. Grace stood waiting. I could feel Harry's smirking eyes on me. I made a wild stab. "I'm sorry—but I can't tango."

"That's a waltz!" Grace laughed.

"I don't waltz either," I faltered, realizing I had made a faux pas—a blunder.

"I don't think you want to dance with me at all," she flashed. Before I could explain further, she and Harry had glided away. I stumbled out of the ball room. Grace's last words—"I'll never speak to you again!" were ringing in my ears.

Why I Never Made Friends

That night I was mighty blue. Why couldn't I make a hit with the girls like the other fellows did? Girls liked me at first but later they went off with fellows who took them dancing. That was my weak point—I could never be popular unless I learned to dance. I had heard of a new way to learn—at home, without music or teacher. Arthur Murray, America's foremost dancing instructor, had perfected this method. I sent for his free booklet and test lesson.

The booklet came promptly and I read it through without stopping. Here was just what I needed. I tried the test lesson and was amazed at the ease with which I was able to master the steps. The lessons were so clear, so simple. I grew confident—eager to dance to music and a real partner.

An Exciting Night

I continued learning so I could attend the coming mask ball at the hotel.

What an exciting night that was! I danced with many partners, keeping perfect time, gliding around the floor like a professional! Midnight found me dancing with a charming creature in a soft, clinging costume.

"Where did you learn to dance so divinely?" she murmured. She was masked but her voice thrilled me strangely. Later I told her the whole story—How I met a beautiful girl and lost her in a day—how wretched I felt—how I learned to dance in my own room.

She caught my hand. "Oh, I'm sorry——" Her voice broke—the voice that thrilled me so strangely. I brushed aside her mask. Imagine my wonder—surprise—joy! It was Grace who was smiling up at me!

What wonderful times we had together after that. We went everywhere—parties, balls and dances. No longer was I a gloomy wallflower, envying others. I was throbbing with new life, new popularity, acclaimed as a faultless dancer wherever I went. The day I wrote to Arthur Murray was certainly the luckiest in my life.

This story is typical. Thousands have learned to dance quickly and easily through Arthur Murray's course. And so can you.

Free! 32 Page Booklet and Test Lesson

Read Mr. Murray's 32 page illustrated booklet and try the Free Test Lesson which proves how easy it is to learn. The book tells how Mr. Murray became private instructor to the "400," how he taught over 250,000 people to dance by mail, and how he can teach **you to** become a graceful, popular dancer in a few enjoyable evenings. And you'll enjoy the Test Lesson because it shows how quickly you can become a good dancer. Mail the coupon at once. Enclose only 25c to cover postage and mailing. Arthur Murray, Studio 593, 3 E. 43rd St., New York City.

Arthur Murray, Studio 593,
3 E. 43rd St., New York City.

Without obligating me in any way, please send me your Free Test Lesson and your beautifully illustrated 32-page book which tells all about Arthur Murray's course in dancing and explains how it can make me a graceful dancer, right in my own home, without music, partner or private teacher. I enclose 25c to cover postage and mailing.

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume VIII JANUARY 15, 1926 Number 1

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN ..... N. EGGENHOFER .....
ANNOUNCEMENT ..... THE EDITOR 2
THE PURPLE LIMOUSINE ..... WILLIAM HENRY WRIGHT .. 3
A Complete Novel
IN THE RUSH HOUR ..... ARTHUR B. REEVE 39
A Short Story
BUDLONG CASTLE ..... KELLOGG JOHNSON 51
A Short Story
WHO RIDETH ALONE ..... PERCIVAL C. WREN 58
A Four Part Story—Part 1
THE DUNRAVEN GIRL ..... REGINALD SWEETLAND 93
A Short Story
LAMMARTO'S DOOR ..... CHARLES B. STILSON 104
A Short Story
LIMPY PLAYS MR. HYDE ..... HERBERT ASBURY 111
A Short Story
A WORD TO CONTRIBUTORS ..... THE EDITOR 124

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ANNOUNCEMENT

THIS is the first number of Mystery Magazine in its new dress.

At first glance, former readers of the magazine will probably have some difficulty in recognizing an old friend, but I feel sure they will agree with me that it is a decided change for the better.

As in the past, Mystery Magazine will be issued twice a month — on the first and fifteenth—and with each succeeding number it is my hope to provide an increasing host of readers with the kind of entertainment that will be as varied in its field as the ingenuity of our writers can make it.

For, after all, nothing in fiction is more entertaining than a well-written, justifiable and satisfying mystery story—possibly because nothing in fiction is harder to write.

THE EDITOR.

The Purple Limousine

By WILLIAM HENRY WRIGHT

CHAPTER I

EXIT MR. DARIUS BLACKMER

THE drives of Westchester, serenely beautiful at any season, take to themselves a special charm when the tawny hand of autumn lays hold on leaf and lawn. Down aisles of crimson and gold winds the black satin of the asphalt. On every hand drowse spacious manors and cottage homes where friendly wood-fires lift light loads of fragrance, summoning to mind far forest and distant stream.

And it was with thoughts such as these that Troy Lawton played as he swung from the old post road and gathered pace for the long hill that interposed its saffron flanks between the main highway and Bonny Gables. Whatever charms a four-room flat had held for him in the soft glow of the honeymoon had vanished with the arrival of a little stranger who constantly demanded more and more room in which to express himself—and the nearest park a mile away!

But some day——

However, for the moment Lawton's occupation was to pilot an automobile through the coils of city traffic, chauffeur for a firm that rented cars by the hour, day or week. His expeditions away from the treeless streets and avenues were infrequent enough, and made, as now, only at the request of a patron who preferred a private car to a commuter's train for a foray into the suburbs.

By the nature of his calling, it fell to Lawton to serve many quaint and eccentric characters, but none more eccentric than the anxious-eyed man who occupied the rear of the big purple limousine he was now driving. More than once Lawton had grinned to himself as he pictured him—grinned with the self-assured amusement of a war veteran at the excessive timidity of one who had never flung his life into the balance on a lead-riven field, or diced with death on a midnight patrol.

Lawton had had his share of this, and his experiences had developed in him a healthy toleration, generally speaking, for the fears of his fellowmen. It was no great crime to be afraid.

Nevertheless, he could not restrain an occasional smile at the precautions insisted upon by his fare for a drive through the city. The man had asked to have all the shades lowered so he would not be seen, and then ordered the doors locked from the outside and himself made virtually prisoner.

"Much the safest, driver," he had chattered nervously, as Lawton, prompt to oblige, set the catches and turned the key. "Gives me a chance to protect myself in case anyone tries to lunge in while we're stalled in traf-

fic. Since the streets got so clogged, a bold thief can attempt most anything without fear of the police."

"You're the doctor," Lawton had smiled. "However, I think the two of us could give anyone who tried it a battle."

So saying, he had slipped his keys into his pocket, hopped into his seat out front, and pulled into the stream of traffic.

AFTER all, he reasoned, perhaps there was a certain wisdom in the man's demands. If armored cars were necessary in transporting payrolls through city streets, perhaps Darius Blackmer might be excused for taking unusual steps to protect the little black bag he carried.

That its contents were of impressive value was deducible from the fact that Blackmer himself was the most adroit, most subtly persuasive salesman in the employ of Dartmoor & Company, a Fifth Avenue gem house, whose seal of approval on a stone was all that was needed to mark it as something of the purest ray serene.

The clientele of Dartmoor & Company was an exclusive one; people with a quick appreciation of the finest and the wealth to indulge a whim, be the cost what it may.

Dealing with patrons of this sort was an art in itself. Individual attention of the most exacting nature was requisite, and often important concessions to the wishes of a prospective buyer had to be made, as in the present instance, when Judge Toler Forsythe, desiring to choose a wedding gift for his daughter, Rosamunde, had asked that a selection of pearl necklaces and diamond bracelets be brought to his country home—Bonny Gables.

The request was not an unusual one. Dartmoor's customers included many semi-invalids and retired business men who detested a trip to the city, and yet, all of them, under compulsion of weddings and anniversaries, were led to bestow valuable presents.

The firm was forced to meet the situation as gracefully as possible by loading down its salesmen and dispatching them to the suburbs. Burdened with such treasure, crowded suburban trains were well avoided, and when a call came recourse was had to a hired automobile with a picked driver from a reliable concern.

Troy Lawton, with his quick eye and six feet of compact muscle, with his known courage and proved integrity, met every requirement, and more than once he had been called upon to drive a Dartmoor salesman on such a mission.

In fact, during the previous spring, he had taken this same Darius Blackmer to one of the exclusive Long Island settlements. At that time he had remarked upon the excessive timidity of the man—a middle-aged, inconspicuous sort, medium in height, light brown hair and close-clipped mustache; one who would have been overlooked anywhere, and yet for fifteen years he had been one of Dartmoor's most successful representatives. A hundred thousand dollar necklace he disposed of as casually as another might a paper of pins.

How many such necklaces, if any, Blackmer now had in his little black bag Lawton knew not. But he was sufficiently well posted on the situation to realize his own responsibilities. It was a case of a sharp eye for suspicious pedestrian or vehicle, and all the speed commensurate with safety.

They stopped only once—at a small cigar store on a busy Harlem corner where Blackmer had called to Lawton to slip in and buy him a package of cigarets. He was back in ten seconds,

dropping the package between the half-lowered window and the drawn curtain behind the driver's seat.

"There you are, sir!" he had cried cheerily; and, sliding into his place, he had thrown in the clutch without so much as having stopped the engine.

Once in the suburbs where the mellow autumn air hung breathless among the ripening leaves, he slumped indolently behind the wheel and gave unresisting sway to the languorous appeal of the moment. So complete was his absorption that the entrance of Bonny Gables took him unawares, and it was only by a quick application of the brakes and a sharp, sudden swerve that he was able to dodge between the low granite posts that told visitors to the Forsythes where to turn.

As he came to a stop before the broad veranda of the large brick and stucco house—a veranda that seemed in itself a gesture of welcome—the judge and his daughter approached across the lawn, evidently having been for a romp with an Irish terrier which came bounding at Lawton as he was leaving his seat.

In a display of whole-souled, caveman affection, no dog can be outdone by an Irish terrier, and for a few moments Lawton was compelled to give undivided attention to a furious greeting.

IT was only as the judge and his daughter came to the rescue that he was able to proceed with the important task of releasing the salesman locked in the car. Indeed, while Rosamunde Forsythe was endeavoring to snap the leash on the dog, the jurist, observing that his guest did not appear, attempted to open the door. Finding it locked, he stood puzzling until he saw Lawton approaching with a ring of keys.

"It's Mr. Blackmer from Dartmoor & Company," explained the driver with just the suspicion of a grin. "He always has himself locked in."

"Oh, yes! Dartmoor's. Locked in. eh? Well, that's safety first."

Lawton slipped the key in the lock and swung wide the door.

"All right, Mr. Blackmer," he cried into the darkened interior, "here we are."

There was no reply.

"Asleep, I guess," he observed, reaching forward and gently swinging the knee of the figure huddled in the corner.

"Mr. Blackmer! Wake up!"

Still no response. Lawton climbed in—and stiffened with a cry.

"Good Lord! He's dead!"

The judge crowded in. He raised the rear curtain.

"Dead!" he echoed. "He's been murdered! Look at that gash over his eye!" Then, with the swift logic of one well-versed in the book of crime, "Where's his bag? The jewels he was bringing out?"

They searched seat and floor.

"It's gone!" blurted Lawton, aghast.

CHAPTER II.

NOTHING TO IT

"COME, Rosamunde," snapped the judge to his daughter, whose startled face appeared in the door, "call the servants and get Dr. Richards on the wire. No. He's operating this afternoon. An ambulance will be quickest. Get the police."

Lawton stood in a daze as the judge started to lift the salesman.

"Here, driver, give us a hand. We'll carry him into the house. The doctors may be able to do something for him yet."

Fumbling awkwardly under the stress of the moment, the two lifted the limp form and succeeded in getting it out of the car before a butler

came running from the house, followed, an instant later, by a gardener, who relieved the judge, enabling him to stand aside, puffing and blowing, to take command of the situation.

"Lay him on the couch-hammock there," he pointed to the far side of the veranda. "May be more air. Does he seem to be breathing?"

The butler bent over the figure a moment, then rose, shaking his head.

"I'm afraid he's gone, sir!"

The judge's lips tightened.

"Rosamunde! Get in the house. This is an ugly business. There's nothing more you can do"—and, as she moved away—"Oh, Rosamunde. Get me a cigar, please. I'd—er—rather not leave here for the moment."

The latter was spoken in lowered tones. Nevertheless, it reached Lawton's ears and made him vaguely uneasy.

"I can't understand it," he frowned, approaching the jurist. "The doors were locked and I had the key. How'd they get in without my knowing?"

The judge shot him a keen glance and averted his eyes to the drive whence the ambulance could be expected momentarily.

"Have a cigar?" he invited, offering the silver humidor which Rosamunde had handed him.

When the driver refused, he extracted a panatella for himself, clipped the end, and lighted it with a hand that shook ever so slightly. A stranger would not have noted, but to the girl it was evident enough that he was unwontedly agitated.

"Beats me," persisted Lawton, plunging his hands in his pockets and scowling at the floor. "Locked him in there myself. Didn't stop to talk with anyone on the way. He might have fainted and hit his head when we rounded a curve. But, then, the bag would be there, wouldn't it?"

"Ought to be," was the judge's laconic reply.

The driver shook his head.

"I don't get it! I don't get it!" he protested.

THE long, low wail of the ambulance siren broke ominously upon them and their eyes sought the end of the drive where soon the speeding vehicle careened into view, a blue-coated policeman clinging to the rear.

A young interne with a distinctly bored manner completed his examination with a startling suddenness. After a question or two, he turned to the patrolman.

"There's nothing can be done, officer. This is your affair. You'd better notify the coroner."

So saying, he slipped his stethoscope in his pocket and took his departure.

The patrolman, a big, bluff fellow, glared menacingly at the company on the veranda—Judge Forsythe, Rosamunde, Troy Lawton, the butler, the gardener and two maidservants, who had appeared from within.

"Now what's all this about?" he growled, fishing for notebook and pencil.

The judge stepped forward.

"I'm Judge Forsythe," he offered. "Formerly of the Court of Appeals. You're one of Chief Bolton's men, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the officer, his tone softening appreciably.

The judge motioned and the two walked to the far end of the veranda where they conversed in undertones. Upon their return, the patrolman transfixed Lawton with a piercing glance and made for the front door.

"Will you show the officer to the telephone, Rosamunde?" requested the jurist. "He wants to get in touch with headquarters."

Planting his well-proportioned bulk at the top of the steps leading to the

Drive, Forsythe puffed silently on his cigar until the policeman returned.

"Now, let's hear your story," were the latter's first words as he issued from the house and approached Lawton, notebook in hand. "Tell us just what happened."

Lawton recounted the details—how he had gone to the jeweler's, picked up the salesman and driven to Bonny Gables.

"What time did you start?"

"About one-thirty."

The patrolman made a laborious notation in his book.

"What time did you get here?"

"Around three, wasn't it?" replied the driver, glancing at the judge.

"Yes—three or shortly after," grumbled Forsythe.

"Came directly out?"

"Yes."

"No stop on the way?"

"Once. He sent me for a pack of cigarets."

"Where?"

"I couldn't tell exactly—without going back. Somewhere around Seventh avenue and 130th Street."

"Away from the car long?"

"Long enough to toss fifteen cents on the counter and grab the weeds. Couldn't have been more than ten seconds at the most."

"Not long enough for anyone to break in and assault him without your knowing it?"

"Impossible. He had his pistol. He would have seen anyone coming."

"But he was blackjacked from in front. Could he have been asleep?"

"Not when he had ordered me to stop."

The patrolman paused while he turned a page in his rapidly filling memorandum book. Then:

"And you say you were the one to lock him in?"

"Yes."

"Let's see the key."

LAWTON reached in his pocket and pulled forth a bunch of keys, which he handed to the officer.

As he did so, Rosamunde Forsythe, who had been eagerly following the questioning, and seemed on the point of breaking in several times, now touched her father's arm.

"Dad!" she cried. "Do you think—do you think the driver ought to talk so much?"

The judge silenced her with an impatient gesture.

"It's all right," he muttered. "It's all right. We've got to get to the bottom of this."

The patrolman unconcernedly slipped the keys into his pocket.

"I'll need those driving back to town," observed Lawton.

"Oh-o-o-o!" drawled the officer. "So you'll need them driving back to town, will you? Well, we'll wait and see what the inspector has to say when he comes." He winked broadly at the judge. "Now, what's your name?"

"Troy Lawton, 225 East 93d Street. Age 27."

"Know all the ropes, don't you? Married?"

"Yes."

"Children?"

"Boy—five months."

"Employer?"

"Brightside Auto Hire Company, 125 West 49th Street.

"How long with them?"

"Three years. And if you don't mind, I'd like to use the phone and let them know what's happened. Dartmoor & Company should know, too."

The officer raised his hand.

"All in good time, my son. Don't get impatient. The inspector'll be right along."

Lawton suddenly was aware of his heart thumping. He had a sense of some tenebrous power tightening itself around him. He breathed deep once or twice as if oppressed. The hint of this undefined danger brought

a thought of all that was nearest and dearest to him—the wife and the youngster in the East Side flat.

His eyes sought Rosamunde Forsythe. She must have caught something of his thought, for the look she returned was one of unspeakable sympathy.

The inspector arrived—a detective with him. They listened to the report of the patrolman, then to the judge, examined the victim, and withdrew for a brief conference.

"If it's all right with you, Inspector, I'd like to be taking the car back to town," put in Lawton as they came up again. "The officer has my address in case you want me for a witness."

"A witness!" laughed the inspector. "That's good. Why, man, you're under arrest."

"Under arrest!" echoed Lawton. "For what?"

"For the murder of Darius Blackmer!"

Lawton's face went gray.

"Murder?" he repeated in a thin, bewildered tone. "Can I—can I phone—my wife?"

"You can phone no one until you tell us what you did with that bag of jewels. Come across, now."

Lawton stared.

"You think I killed him and stole that bag?"

"Of course you did it. Who else could have done it? You might as well confess. You're caught. But come along, we'll go down to headquarters and talk the thing over. We have a few persuaders down there that help a man know what's good for him." He leered at the judge. "Hop along, now."

Lawton stood as if paralyzed. Then, with a sudden movement, he turned to Rosamunde Forsythe.

"Call Sergeant Vitelini, Police Headquarters, New York," he said hurriedly. "Tell him I'm in trouble."

With that he joined the inspector. As they passed the purple limousine, which was to be left where it was until after the coroner's inquest, the detective, who had been going over the interior with a magnifying glass, caught a metallic gleam in the rug. He stopped and drew forth the tip of a needle, perhaps half an inch long. He examined it critically a moment and then handed it to his chief.

"Hypodermic," he observed, pointing to its hollow center.

CHAPTER III.

MELANCTHON SPONG, M.D.

SERGEANT VITELINI no longer possessed the lightning, panther-like thrust that was his the day he leaped upon the Mayor's would-be assassin and disarmed him before he could fire a shot.

His girth was kept in leash only by the conscientious application of setting-up—and sitting-down—exercises and, despite all his efforts, persisted in a modest little rotundity very much in the way when scurrying up and down loft buildings in pursuit of nimble bandits.

But his courage was in no wise affected by this disconcerting thickening of the wrapper. Neither did his intelligence appear the least impaired, so that he was a very much respected member of the detective force—respected not only by his fellows and superiors, but also by the criminal world at large—and many who were not at large, owing to his keen insight and devilish habit of striking swift and hard.

With brisk steps and set lips, the sergeant rounded the corner of Fifth Avenue and 51st Street on the morning following the arrest of Troy Lawton, and, proceeding down the cross-street, turned in at a small apartment-house, in a first-floor window of which

was the modest sign—Melancthon Spong, M.D.

Doctor Spong, had he been so minded, could have strung half an alphabet after his name in the way of degrees and honorary designations, but a simple M.D. contented him. He was not an ostentatious man, as the trifling proportions of the shingle indicated.

THE sergeant was betimes—it was not yet ten. But he wanted a word with the doctor, if only of the briefest sort, before the daily flow of patients began. A Japanese butler opened the door at his ring and conducted him to a luxurious reception-room where he had scarcely seated himself when a uniformed nurse appeared. He rose at her smile of recognition.

"Can I see the doctor for half a second?" he asked. "I won't keep him."

"I think so," was her reply. "One moment, please."

She was back promptly, and with a nod invited him to follow into the inner sanctuary where Melancthon Spong pursued the mystic rites of his calling.

"So soon?" was the doctor's greeting, extending a limp, bony hand for Vitelini's warm, plump grip. "I thought we were sworn enemies."

"That was yesterday," grinned the sergeant. "Today is another day."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will. Let us hope it will be always to-day. The loss of so engaging a friend as yourself would be a calamity indeed. Won't you be seated? No—the easy armchair there. I bought that specially for my stout callers."

He turned to hide a sly, mocking smile and the sergeant, pretending to bristle, stubbornly seized a footrest and planted it an arm's length from the wing chair into which the doctor flung himself. For a moment they sat silent, Spong searching his friend's face with warm, amused eyes.

The doctor's eyes were not of the gimlet kind that bore deep and pluck out secrets willy-nilly; they were the understanding eyes of a man who has ranged far in the inexhaustible field of human motives and emotions and who watches with the eagerness of an explorer for a new facet of life which experience had taught him ever to expect.

As an alienist, criminologist, and high priest of the ubiquitous cult of modern psychiatry, his reputation was international. He had studied the *genus homo* in many lands and was well versed in its vagaries.

They were tolerant eyes, those of Doctor Spong, and outwardly unforgettable. The lids, from the bridge of the nose, fell away in straight diagonals to the outer tips, giving him the appearance of looking out through the half-open door of a tent. With his lined cheeks, thatch of iron-gray hair, and tall, wiry frame, he was a conspicuous figure in any gathering.

"YOU have something for the exercise of my poor talents?" he asked lightly, as he watched Vitelini light a cigaret.

"Have you read the papers?" was the latter's retort.

"I glanced over them at breakfast."

"You noticed the murder of that salesman of Dartmoor's?"

"Yes. Read the headlines. Simple case, wasn't it? The chauffeur?"

Vitelini's lips tightened.

"A friend of mine. Framed!"

"Framed?" The doctor's eyes lighted. "How so?"

"That's the point. That's why I am here."

"You mean you have good reason to believe the crime was committed without the knowledge of the driver?"

"I am positive of it."

"On what grounds?"

"His character. I've known him since we palled together in the trenches. He's no more capable of a thing like that than you or I."

The doctor permitted himself a smile full of worldly wisdom.

"Your loyalty is inspiring, sergeant. But it proves nothing. The most estimable men do the most surprising things when the provocation is great enough."

The sergeant bit his lips. Unless he succeeded in enlisting the doctor's interest on the basis of an unusual phase of crime technique, he would be compelled to play a lone hand in Lawton's defense against the dicta of common sense backed by the unanimous, slow-paced opinion of all officialdom.

And one never could tell just how a thing would strike the doctor, or which way he would jump. Often when the State sought his services as an alienist to prove a defendant sane, the district attorney would discover that he had already been retained by the prisoner's counsel to establish insanity. Spong was ready to play it either way, whichever side got to him first, though as a rule he preferred to take the sanity side. It was much the more difficult. Proving a criminal mentally unbalanced was no trick at all.

Furthermore, from an official standpoint the doctor was not wholly reliable in his attitude toward a lawbreaker. Often he would become so absorbed in testing a new theory whereby to transmute a vicious thug into a law-abiding citizen that he lost sight of the ends of justice. And he would be forced into the position of shielding a fugitive malefactor from pestiferous police in order that he might not be deprived of a promising subject. His efforts in this direction —actuated entirely from professional rather than personal motives—had won him many friends in the underworld.

To Melancthon Spong men of both sides of the law turned in an *impasse*, trusting implicitly in his uncanny perceptive qualities, in his judgments based on a wide knowledge of human motives and extended investigations into all phases of criminology.

His office was a veritable temple of psychiatry. He occupied two floors, with a staff of two assistant doctors, two nurses and a stenographer, who, under his direction, pursued their patient investigations into the unconscious, seeking to trap elusive thought in its lair, and impale it, like a dancing butterfly, for critical examination.

Frequently Spong was in the anomalous position of knowing more about a man than a man knew about himself. Once a patient had been placed in an hypnotic state and a vigorous cross-examination undertaken, only the doctor and his staff knew the answers given, and they guarded well their secrets.

"I would not have come to you," observed Vitelini after he had recounted the details of Lawton's arrest, "if I were not convinced of his innocence. They had him up all night giving him the third degree. I did all I could to make it easy for him; but with the evidence what it is, I couldn't make much of an impression on the inspector. They're hot after that bag of jewels and can't think of anything else. Of course, the boy knows nothing about it, and the harder he sticks to his story, the madder they get. He'll go to the chair sure unless something breaks."

The doctor mused a moment in silence.

"If you are right and the driver is really innocent," he said at length, "it makes a rather pretty problem. What's your theory?"

"I haven't any."

"H'm-m-m! We might go over the case from your angle. Where are you lunching?"

"Wherever you say," returned the sergeant, his hopes rising at this stir of interest in the physician.

"Meet me at the Van Tuysel at one."

Vitelini rose. As he did so, the doctor pressed an electric buzzer. When the nurse appeared, the sergeant, making his exit, heard him say:

"Haven't we a history of Judge Toler Forsythe? It seems to me he came to us—about four years ago, unless I am mistaken. See if you can't find an envelope."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MONK

THE great dining-room of the Van Tuysel was thronged with noontide patrons. Sumptuous carpets yielded to the tread of passing guest and waiter, muffling every sound save the murmur of voices and the droning of a persistent, though unappreciated, stringed orchestra.

At sight of Doctor Spong, the head-waiter displayed an astonishing alacrity, and, delivering himself of his most urbane smile, led the way to a quiet corner where two might converse undisturbed. Before examining the menu, the doctor cast his eyes about the room and nodded twice to acquaintances.

"I had a moment this morning to study your side of the argument," Spong began, coming quickly to the point as soon as the waiter had served a delicately-browned filet of sole with a few modest accompaniments. "Assuming the innocence of the driver, what other suspects have you listed?"

"None."

The doctor raised his eyebrows.

"Come, come, sergeant, that isn't like you."

"I've been sticking to headquarters," defended the latter. "Saving Lawton all I could."

"Humph! Thoughtful, but foolish. Well, we can check them over now. The motive, of course, is obvious—theft of the jewels. The method is obscure, but that, for the moment, need not engage us. We know that a man with a bag of jewels entered an automobile at one-thirty in New York and two hours later, at a Westchester country home, was found dead with the bag missing, leaving the unescapable deduction that the crime was committed along the way. I suppose a description of the articles missing has been sent to the pawnshops and fences?"

"Last night. The insurance people got right after that end of it. They have some of their own men working on the recovery. They're watching Lawton's flat. Think his wife has the bag—or knows where it is."

"H'm! Well, let's see, now—how many persons knew Blackmer was to make the trip to Bonny Gables?"

"Judge Forsythe, of course, and his daughter."

"Yes—and any of the servants at his house who heard the matter discussed." The doctor paused. "Judge Forsythe at one end, and at the other Dartmoor & Company. At least one or more employees must have been cognizant of the prospective deal."

"And the taxi company," put in the sergeant.

"Right. There are three sensitive points which would bear exploration. Was Blackmer married?'

"No."

"Relatives?"

"Distant ones in Ohio, I believe. The remains are to be sent there."

"The doctor paused and reflectively stirred his coffee, into which the waiter had deposited two snowy lumps of sugar.

"Judge Forsythe was a patient of mine a few years ago," he mused.

"A trifling condition of nerves. He responded quickly. But—I have been wondering—do you know anything about his financial condition?"

"Millionaire, isn't he?"

"Possibly. It might be well to verify that point. But our first step is to learn who gave the order for Blackmer to come to Bonny Gables; how it was given, and the exact time it was given. The crime must have been carefully plotted. Someone knew what was in the wind and had time to formulate his plans. We may learn something from the length of time that was available—always providing your friend Lawton is not the guilty man."

He smiled and motioned to the waiter for the check.

"You are not convinced of his innocence?" frowned Vitelini.

"We shall see," was the noncommittal reply. "Let's run over and have a talk with the Dartmoor people."

He laid a crisp ten-dollar note on the tray the waiter placed in front of him, and then was about to dip his fingers in the finger-bowl which had also been brought. His hand in mid-air, he paused and drew from beneath the lace paper doily on which the bowl rested a small card.

There was a message written thereon, which Vitelini saw him read without the least change of expression before slipping the card into his pocket. On the return of the waiter with the change, the two left the dining-room.

Not until they were in a taxi outside did the doctor withdraw the card and show it to Vitelini. It read:

Dartmoor is not your lay. Keep off—THE MONK.

"The Monk!" cried the sergeant.

"The same. It begins to look as though your friend Lawton may be innocent after all."

CHAPTER V

MR. SOLOMON STEIN

FROM the Van Tuysel to the corner where Dartmoor & Company carried on its commerce in fine gems was a trifling distance, yet traffic blockades occasioned long delays, irritating to the mercurial Vitelini, but disturbing the doctor not at all. Indeed, he seemed rather to relish the interruption as giving an opportunity to assess the significance of a new factor now injected into the situation.

"Have you a detailed inventory of the articles missing?" he inquired—a little irrelevantly, the sergeant thought.

"No," was the reply. "They have it at headquarters. Six or eight necklaces and as many bracelets, I believe. Also a few rings."

"And worth — say three hundred thousand?"

"Thereabouts."

The doctor pursed his lips.

"An impressive figure," he mused. "But still a bagatelle to The Monk. He usually aims at bigger game; mail pouches with bonds in the millions."

"Funny! I don't place him."

"You probably know him under another name. He came to me as Alfred Le Bouletier in London years ago. That accounts for his extreme informality in addressing me by way of a card under a finger-bowl."

"Then that waiter——?"

"Probably knows nothing. The Monk has his agents at many strategic points and could contrive to impose on the waiter without difficulty. He recognized you and deduced what was up."

"And of course you will be frightened off," sneered Vitelini politely.

"We shall see," drawled Spong. "We shall see. But I don't yet understand why The Monk should connive at murder to snap up a trifling bag

of jewels. Game must be running low."

Blocked at a corner, the two descended and made their way afoot to the rich jewel repository that went under the name of Dartmoor & Company.

TO DO full justice to the treasure in his vaults and cases, Lloyd Dartmoor, founder of the firm, should have erected a diminutive Taj Mahal with imposing approaches and richly-caparisoned attendants. And yet, a parcel of Fifth Avenue realty can hardly be considered a cheap setting for a collection of fine stones, and old Mr. Dartmoor, by taking a prominent corner on the fabulous thoroughfare, doubtless thought he was doing handsomely enough by his hoard. The interior, with its flawless glass and mute oak in dark, chaste panels was a little severe in line, a little subdued in tone. But it was a studied effect, designed to focus attention solely upon the gems themselves.

A word to one of the clerks brought an attendant, who conducted Doctor Spong and the eager Vitelini to the rear of the building. Here were the vaults, the private offices of the firm members, and the little rooms where the lapidaries worked at their exacting craft, cutting and polishing the stones which came to Dartmoor's in raw state from all parts of the world.

In a small conference room, the attendant left them in order to summon Lloyd Dartmoor, who presently joined them. Vitelini, displaying his credentials, announced the purpose of their visit.

"This is Doctor Spong, the alienist," he said by way of introduction. "The doctor has kindly consented to lend us a hand. He frequently helps us out on puzzling cases."

The famous jeweler bowed courteously, then:

"Is this case so very puzzling? It is merely a matter of determining where the driver concealed the gems, is it not?"

"Presumably," returned the sergeant. "But there are one or two points which we wish to establish, if you can give us a moment."

"Surely! Surely! Sit down, gentlemen."

Once seated around the table, it was the doctor who took up the thread of inquiry.

"I take it you are fully protected against the loss," he began, struck by the unruffled demeanor of the man.

"Fully. Our salesmen are bonded and we carry ample insurance. Still, we should prefer to recover the stones. We have an artist's pride in his handiwork. We feel a Dartmoor gem deserves a better fate than being bandied about among cutthroats and thieves."

"It is your established practice, then, to send your salesmen out so richly laden?"

"Whenever the call comes. With our clientele it is necessary, whatever our preference might be. But we try to take every precaution."

"You keep an accurate list, of course, of each article the salesman puts in his case?"

"Assuredly. As you probably know, each piece of jewelry has its number and its place in the trays and cases. Whatever is removed must be accounted for. Each salesman, on going outside, lists and signs for everything he takes, usually under the direction of the general manager."

"And he is?"

"Mr. Solomon Stein."

Dartmoor pressed a buzzer, and, on the appearance of the attendant, asked to have Mr. Stein called.

"He is the man you really should talk to. He has the business at his finger-tips. Myself—I am here irregularly, and my sons, I regret to say,

are inclined to leave initiative and final judgment to Mr. Stein."

It was some minutes before the manager appeared. Apparently his responsibilities were too great to be dropped on the instant even at the summons of the proprietor.

Stein was a small man and possessed of the finest cultural qualities of his race. His was a suave dignity which enabled him to retain a definite impressiveness while at the same time putting people at their ease. His black mustache was scrupulously neat; his complexion, p a l e and smooth; his large black eyes, dulled with an oriental impassivity utterly unreadable.

He bowed gravely when introduced, and Vitelini, watching Doctor Spong, thought he detected a flash of interest in the physician's eyes, as though face to face with a human enigma well worth his study.

Dartmoor briefly explained the situation, and, at the request for a detailed list of what had been stolen, Stein drew from his pocket a memorandum-book.

"Ten pearl necklaces," he read, "from ten to twenty thousand dollars each; six bracelets—diamond and sapphire—two to five thousand each; four emerald and diamond rings, from two to three thousand each."

He closed the book.

"IS that all?" asked the doctor.

Stein met the query with an imperturbable glance.

"All? Is that not enough?"

"Indeed so. I don't know why I asked. The list seemed so short and the newspaper headlines so big. In these days of glib millions we lose our sense of proportion. You yourself checked over the things in Mr. Blackmer's bag, I suppose?"

"No. We do not carry our supervision that far with trusted men. He consulted with me regarding what he would take and signed for them on the ledger we keep for that purpose."

The doctor bent upon the manager's impassive countenance a glance so intense as to be almost impertinent.

"This request from Judge Forsythe —for a salesman to call"—he put in—"are you familiar with how it came?"

"I believe he 'phoned. That is usually the custom."

"'Phoned to whom?"

"To Mr. Blackmer. All our men have their own followings. Our regular patrons get into the habit of dealing with one particular salesman, and won't go to any other."

"When did this call come?"

"Monday morning."

"But Mr. Blackmer did not go to Bonny Gables until Wednesday afternoon."

"No."

"Why was that?"

"I do not know. It might have been the judge's own choice, or, again, it might have been Blackmer's. They arranged the matter between them."

"There was, then, an interim of forty-eight hours between the making of the appointment to visit Bonny Gables and the departure of Mr. Blackmer. Besides yourself and the salesman, do you know of any others here at the store who were aware of the projected mission?"

"No one—to my knowledge. Our men are all instructed to keep such dealings strictly private as a matter of precaution. They never talk, even among themselves. I doubt if Blackmer mentioned the matter until he was ready to start. There might have been a leak on the telephone, of course. But our switchboard operator is a young lady of discretion. She has been with us some years. Her orders against listening in are explicit and I have reason to believe that she obeys them to the letter."

The doctor fell silent. Suddenly he looked up.

"What's your theory?" he asked.

"Theory?" echoed Stein, caught off his guard and for an instant losing something of his poise. "Why—what theory? This driver is responsible, isn't he? What other hypothesis is there? Have you some other clue?"

It seemed to Vitelini that the man's voice had tightened—had raised its pitch under a sudden stress.

"We have no other clue," replied the doctor. "Not as yet. But we may find one, and we can, of course, count on your fullest cooperation?"

"Most assuredly, most assuredly," broke in Lloyd Dartmoor, who had been following the questioning with interest and seemed now to catch a hint of some subsurface play. "Whatever we can do—you have only to say the word. I speak not only for the firm, but also for each member of the staff. Mr. Blackmer was well liked by all. And all have a personal interest in seeing his assailants brought to justice. Is it not so, Mr. Stein?"

The manager nodded.

"How could it be otherwise?" was his suave reply.

The doctor and Vitelini took their leave. Once outside, making their way afoot to the physician's office, Spong turned to his companion:

"Stein is keeping something back. I am positive of it. Something Dartmoor doesn't know." He paused a moment. "I fear, my friend, we have our work cut out for us. There's an undercurrent here that has a treacherous look."

CHAPTER VI

THREE MIKADOS

THEY did not return to Doctor Spong's office.

They had not gone two blocks along Fifth Avenue before the physician began to develop an astonishing interest in the window displays. With irritating frequency he stopped to examine oil paintings, antique furniture, Dutch porcelains, silk shirts; a motley that should normally interest only an idle curiosity, hardly a mind engrossed with a crime problem which had already cost one life and might demand another.

Vitelini's patience was taxed to the utmost to hold his peace. When suddenly the doctor faced about and began to retrace his steps down the avenue, the sergeant was unable to endure longer and broke out with a petulant:

"Did you forget something?"

The doctor, instead of replying, raised a hand commanding silence and quickened his pace so that the short-legged Vitelini was hard put to it to keep up. At a haberdashery Spong stopped short and, with a wave of his Malacca cane, pointed to an alarming blue and purple cravat.

"Stunning, isn't it?" he observed.

The sergeant, too discomfited for words, grunted unintelligibly. Then he caught the doctor's voice in quick, suppressed tones:

"Don't look now. We'll go inside where we can observe without being seen. Across the street, looking in the bookstore window, is a short red-haired man. He is following us. I noticed him when we came out of the Van Tuysel."

"One of The Monk's gang?"

"Possibly. Let's step inside."

They entered the store and, while examining the assortment of neckwear which the clerk brought out, took occasion to study the figure across the street.

"Recognize him?" asked the doctor.

The sergeant shook his head.

"Not from this distance."

An avalanche of traffic intervened, and completing a purchase for form's sake, the two turned toward the door.

"We'll find out which one of us he's

trailing," proposed the doctor. "At Fifty-ninth Street, you go east to the subway. I'll cut through the park and take the elevated and join you at headquarters."

They stepped from the store and started smartly up the avenue, parting at the Plaza according to plan.

THE trees and shrubbery masking the turns in the park walks gave the doctor ample opportunity to reconnoitre the course he had taken without a pursuer being aware of observation. At the first sharp corner, where a clump of low growth offered cover, he peered back. He had view of a hundred-yard straightaway.

Two nursemaids, walking abreast as they pushed their sleeping charges, were all that first appeared to view. Then, behind them, the doctor's quick eye caught the head of the man he had spotted on the avenue.

So he, himself, was the object of pursuit! Well, he would lead the little fellow a pretty chase! Setting off with rapid stride, Spong shot up the Mall, then across and back, doubling and twisting on his course, steadily working his way westward until he was confident he had shaken off his pursuer. From a leafy entrance on the far side, he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to the nearest elevated station.

Sergeant Vitelini was waiting for him at the entrance to police headquarters.

"I was the man!" announced the doctor crisply. "He followed me half way through the park. But I got rid of him."

The sergeant winked.

"You didn't have all the honors," he said. "There's a man in the entrance of the cigar store on the corner. He isn't red-headed. But he trailed me all the way down."

"Well, now, that's interesting, is it not?"

They turned into the big main entrance. On the way to the Detective Bureau, Inspector McGillicuddy overtook them.

"Howdy, doctor! Glad to see you," was his cordial greeting. Then he turned to Vitelini. "That Lawton is one tough one. Five of us have been taking turns on him all day. We haven't been able to budge him. We've just about played out our hand. Only one card left."

"And that is?" queried the doctor.

"His wife. If she doesn't break him, we're quits. They're going to bring her in now. Come along, doctor, and take a look at them. I'd like to get your opinion."

HE led the way to that refined torture chamber dedicated to the third degree.

Faced by three burly officials, who alternately thundered and wheedled, threatened and pleaded, sat Troy Lawton, his head lolling, his face haggard from a night and a day of continuous grueling.

The doctor detected at once the physical symptoms of complete exhaustion. Another hour of it and the boy would collapse. His eyes were already dazed; from his parched lips came a raw, husky monotone: "I don't know, I don't know," repeated over and over again in answer to every question.

He did not seem to be aware of the entrance of newcomers. So many had passed in and out through the long night and longer day!

Another door opened. He did not look up. A police matron entered accompanied by a young girl whose face also told of a sleepless night. She stopped short upon sight of Lawton, as if struggling to control herself. The officials fell back and, urged by the matron, the girl timidly advanced, visibly in the grip of an intense mental struggle wherein terror itself was

being engulfed by the wave of unspeakable pity that had swept over her at sight of the gray face and huddled figure before her.

She crept toward him, her lips working as she fought to keep back the tears. Then she broke, and, with a cry that voiced all the burden of her heart, rushed toward him, flinging herself on her knees at his side and sobbing uncontrollably. Lawton raised his head. A look of dull comprehension came to his tired eyes. He raised his arm weakly and placed it about her. Then he fainted away.

Vitelini looked at Doctor Spong. Both were men hardened to scenes of anguish, but both had been touched. The sergeant motioned, and, leaving Lawton and his wife to first-aid ministrations, the two withdrew to an ante-room.

Here Vitelini stepped to a cabinet and pulled out a small drawer labeled Darius Blackmer. On the bottom lay a small calibre pistol, a gold watch and chain, a bunch of keys, a package of cigarets, a bill folder and a memorandum-book containing an address list. Also, the broken tip of a hypodermic needle.

"Our sole clue," observed Vitelini, picking up the latter. "The rest are the personal effects found on Blackmer."

The doctor lifted each article and examined it with care. The address list was of special interest. Names to him in his wide practice were often sources of the greatest illumination. His memory for them was particularly sharp.

"If Blackmer was a man who talked," he observed, "we might find it profitable to look up his intimates."

Chancing upon an identification-card indicating persons to be notified in case of accident, he took out his own memorandum-book and jotted down the name and address—a certain Sigismund Worth of Bordentown, Ohio.

This done, he picked up the package of cigarets.

"These, I presume, were the ones he sent Lawton in to buy."

"Yes."

"Mikados. Come twenty in a pack, don't they?"

The sergeant nodded.

"Here are seventeen. Three cigarets smoked after he left 130th Street. Now, what does that tell us as to the time and location of the murder?"

CHAPTER VII

GASSED

INSPECTOR McGILLICUDDY interrupted them.

"Can you beat that, doctor?" he sputtered. "Just as we have things all ribbed up for a grand finale, he keels over on us. Now we'll have to start all over again. What do you make of him?"

The doctor swung his cane reflectively.

"You've given him a pretty stiff dose," he replied. "It might be wise to let up on him for twenty-four hours."

"And let that bag of loot slip out of our hands? No, sir. The newspapers are pushing us too hard. He knows where that bag is, and he's got to come across."

"Have you seriously considered another hypothesis? What if the story he tells is true and he really knows nothing?"

The inspector bristled.

"Poppycock! What other hypothesis can there be?"

"I confess I have no alternative to offer. But one might be worked out."

"Go to it. The last thing in the world I want to do is to send an innocent man to the chair. But when I've got a triple-cinched case like I've got against Lawton, I don't intend to

let loose until something a lot better turns up."

The doctor was silent. What had he to suggest? A warning from The Monk? A red-haired man following him; another man shadowing Vitelini? To the inspector, this information would merely indicate accomplices; would identify Lawton with a criminal band and make the going only the harder for him. A suspicion that Solomon Stein of Dartmoor's was keeping something back? There was no tangible evidence to support such a claim.

No, until he had contrived a strong working hypothesis, which would relieve Lawton of the burden of guilt, silence was the better part of wisdom. And two things were essential to stem the tide setting against the driver: first, a logical explanation of how the crime might have been committed without his knowledge; second, an individual or group against whom suspicion could be directed.

ONCE alone with Vitelini outside, he queried:

"You are sure Lawton couldn't be connected in any way with The Monk?"

"Impossible!" expostulated the sergeant. "You saw him. You know criminal types. He's not that kind. And his wife. Did you ever see a lovelier little girl?"

"H'm! Quite so! Quite so! But we mustn't let sentiment blind us to facts." He mused a moment. "The case against Lawton is so complete, the inspector is so sure—it makes rather a fascinating problem to demonstrate the contrary. Do you know, sergeant, I'm beginning to like your end of the argument better and better."

"What about The Monk? Can't we run him down?"

"Yes—perhaps. But, unless he has greatly changed his tactics, we shall hear from him again, hear from him in a most emphatic manner. We have only to wait."

"But why does he pick on you?"

"Because he fears me enough to want me on his side in any conflict with the authorities. I was instrumental in obtaining his release in a difficulty in the Mayfair part of London years ago. However, I doubt whether his sense of gratitude is sufficiently developed to permit past favors to militate against present necessities."

"A bad actor, then."

"One of the worst. And yet, let's not permit him to engage us too closely until we have worked over all the factors in the case. It's always best to go at a thing logically and run down all the leads before jumping to a conclusion. And since there are a number of angles to work from, we may as well divide them up.

"You can take the taxi company. Check up on their list of patrons and when and how the call from Dartmoor's for the limousine was given. Estimate the chances for a leak. Next"—he tapped the palm of his hand with his cane as he enumerated each point—"get a line on Judge Forsythe's finances. Third, search Blackmer's apartment, interview his friends, and find out his manner of living. And while you are about it, get one of your men to shadow that pursuer of yours, who, I perceive, is still watching us from the cigar store yonder."

The sergeant did not turn.

"And what about yourself?"

"I shall deal with The Monk and also devise a method whereby a man in a locked limousine might be murdered and robbed without the knowledge of the driver sitting five feet away with the keys to the car in his pocket."

"You've chosen the toughest part of the job," conceded Vitelini.

"It's a hurdle that must be taken if Lawton is to be freed. Come to my office tomorrow morning at ten with the results of your inquiries. I hope I shall have something myself to contribute."

With that the doctor hailed a taxi and departed.

VITELINI remained a few moments on the steps to watch the figure in the cigar store entrance and make sure that it did not go trailing after Spong. Perceiving that the man did not move, the sergeant returned inside, explained the situation to the inspector and had a man assigned to take up the trail. Then he emerged and headed toward a certain Wall Street bond house that kept close watch on men of wealth.

It was four o'clock before Doctor Spong, encountering many traffic delays, reached his office. As he entered, Miss Dawson, the nurse, came forward hurriedly, on her face a look of concern quite unusual in one so well schooled in maintaining perfect composure under all circumstances.

"Doctor! I'm so glad you've come. We've had a very close call."

"Close call?"

"Doctor Finley—he was nearly gassed. Oh, he's all right. He's sleeping now. He just got a whiff. But it knocked him out."

"A whiff of what?"

"A package—left at the door. It had the label of The Sanitas Instrument Company, and I turned it over to Doctor Finley, supposing it was some apparatus you ordered. When he opened it, he was enveloped in poison gas. He barely got out of the room in time. Luckily, the windows were open so it drifted out."

The doctor's lips curled grimly.

"Was the package delivered to you?"

"No. Charlie took it at the door."

"Ask him to come here."

The Japanese butler was prompt in appearing.

"What kind of man left that package?" snapped the doctor.

Charlie's expression seemed unwontedly blank.

"I forget," he said.

"Short or tall?"

There was a moment of deep thought.

"Short."

"Did he have red hair?"

Again the agony of trying to recollect, and then, as though some association suddenly struck him, the Jap broke into smiles of relief.

"Yes! Yes!" he chattered. "Red hair! Red hair!"

The Monk, as was his custom, had struck swiftly!

CHAPTER VIII

COLORFUL AND STAGEY

WHENEVER Doctor Spong was confronted by a problem that threatened to give his ripened mentality the fullest occupation, he had recourse to a stratagem, which more often than not, met the situation with astounding speed and facility.

After a period of intense concentration, it was his practice to seek out the gayest musical comedy in town, and, acquiring a seat well forward, to give himself over completely to the eye and ear appeal of the offering. The effect was to sweep the problem from his mind, to release him from all conscious effort, all straining after an elusive solution.

Then, lulled by song and laughter into a state of utter relaxation, lo, *apropos* of nothing at all, the solution would pop into his consciousness, and he would leave the theatre, buoyed by a sense of triumph which hours of diligent application in the seclusion of his study might not have achieved.

So it was that the evening of the day on which the lethal bomb had been delivered at his office found Doctor Spong seated in the third row at a smart revue, following with conspicuous attention the gyrations of a semi-nude chorus. In point of distraction, little more could be desired.

Yet, when the final curtain fell, the doctor discovered that no enlightening intuition had come to him and the mystery shrouding the assault on Blackmer remained as impenetrable as it was upon leaving Vitelini at police headquarters that afternoon.

He moved into the crowded aisles and took the slow pace of the throng making its way to the exits. People, singly or *en masse*, invariably interested him, and from the vantage point of his good six feet he ran his eyes over the heads massed about him, picking out distinctive types with the practised eye of a profound student of the human.

It was in the lobby, where the crowd became densest, almost immobile, in fact, by reason of its numbers, that Doctor Spong was abruptly brought to himself by a sharp jab in the small of his back. At the same instant an intense voice came to him, a voice pitched low so as not to rise above the chatter of the crowd, but sharp enough to reach his ear with the precision of a temple bell.

"Don't look! You know what I have in my hand! Go where I tell you!"

It was a woman who spoke. No least flicker of emotion crossed the doctor's face. He was well aware what was prodding him in the back—a small revolver!

And there was something familiar in the inflection of the voice. Yet he could not place it. His eyes searched for a mirror which would give him a view of those behind. There was one above the exit. He would see once they came within its range. For the moment there was nothing to do but move with the crowd.

Slowly, calmly, he advanced. Within a few yards of the door he looked up. The cold, dark eyes of the woman met his in the glass. Then he knew—knew, too, the fatuousness of attempting to thwart her under the circumstances in which he was now placed. Her moods were as wild and unreasoning as her name was colorful and stagey.

Georgia Dawn!

He could see while the mirror served him how she had draped the end of a fur stole about her forearm to conceal the weapon she held. It appeared as though she merely had hold of his arm.

"This way," she prodded when they reached the sidewalk, and, turning down the side street, they walked half a block before coming abreast of a limousine stalled in the traffic lines. At sight of them, the chauffeur jumped from his seat and opened the door. Obedient to the woman's command, the doctor entered the car and sank back on its voluptuous cushions. Gripped in the congested thoroughfare, the car moved by inches when it moved at all. Yet he made no effort to resist or signal for help.

"You do not speak, my friend," said the woman at length.

"I am waiting for you," was his calm reply.

He heard her laugh; cold, like the tinkle of icicles shattered upon a window-pane.

"There will be time for that—at my apartment."

The doctor's eyebrows lifted ever so slightly. So that was the program!

"How long is it," he chided, "since Georgia Dawn has to take recourse to threats to win an escort to an after-theatre supper?"

"About five minutes," she retorted crisply.

"Isn't it something of an admission

of a loss—shall we say—of personal charm?"

"Not in the least. I am more beautiful than ever. But you are not an ordinary man. Otherwise, you would not be sitting there, bantering, with a pistol at your heart. I was forced to extraordinary measures to persuade you. It was necessary that you come—tonight."

"You are very mysterious."

"Perhaps. But you will understand when I have told you."

They relapsed into silence.

A wondrously beautiful woman was Georgia Dawn—graduate of one of the famous revues, courted by a host of suitors, preyed upon by an army of sycophants who loved to bask in the sensuous assurance of the great wealth that was hers.

At the zenith of her stage career, a railroad magnate had persuaded her to give up everything and marry him. Two years afterward he had died, leaving her ten million dollars. Much of this had slipped through her fingers, thanks to the racetrack, the stock market, and the diligent cultivation of her many friends.

But at thirty-one, she still possessed enough beauty, money and fame to make her an active, going celebrity, and having reverted to her stage name, she held court quite as brilliantly as the most adored of the cinema queens.

Only Melancthon Spong knew of the flaw that tainted her life of ease and pleasure—the flaw that had made her a patient of his when her husband, discovering certain alarming tendencies in her temperament, took radical steps to have them obliterated. And aware of this weakness, he appreciated better than any other man just how dangerous a person she was with a loaded pistol in her hand.

THE car pulled up at a large Park Avenue apartment block. They entered a Gothic foyer bestrewn with Turkish rugs. A silent elevator bore them aloft and delivered them directly into the reception-room of Georgia Dawn's luxurious home. A maidservant relieved them of their wraps, and, when they had seated themselves in the drawing-room, appeared with a tea-wagon.

"Ah! Camembert and champagne!" exclaimed the doctor appreciatively. "How did you guess?"

A slow smile played about the lips of his hostess.

"How do you ask? Has not my life been largely devoted to pleasing men? I should know what they like!" Then, after an adroit pause: "I do believe, doctor, you are not so very different from other men in spite of your abstemious habits and anchorite's life. I watched you at the theatre tonight. La Capello's dance held you quite as spellbound as the others."

"A real artist, and remarkably beautiful," mused the doctor. "Yet—present company——"

He raised his glass and touched hers in a silent toast.

"Compliments?" she murmured when they had sipped. "My dear doctor, you grow ordinary by the minute. I have not learned to expect them from you."

For a moment his quiet eyes searched her face.

"If it would not seem impertinent," he smiled, "I should like to inquire just what you do expect of me—now that I am here?"

CHAPTER IX

GEORGIA EXPLAINS

THE woman was silent. And Spong was conscious of a sudden tightening of her manner, a quick coolness like the breath from a forest spring on a sultry day.

Never had he been wholly insensi-

tive to her beauty—the sinuous figure, the slumbrous eyes of an odalisque. More than once in the year that she had been under his care he had felt that subtle, exotic appeal creeping upon him.

Each time he had exorcized it, swiftly and thoroughly as became a man whose profession was paramount—always. That she would not have repulsed the thought of an *amour* with him, however, had been made clear in many delicate ways. And he did not know what ashes of romance still smoldered within her.

He half suspected some lingering hope accounted for her bringing him here at the point of a pistol, forcing him into the provocative atmosphere of midnight, champagne *à deux*, and faint perfume.

He looked about him. The drawing-room had a mellow seductiveness, all gray and gold, with antiques artfully placed to give a sense of spaciousness. Low lamps, with their yellow shades, glowed like forgotten blobs of sunset. At windows and doors hung heavy curtains of gray taffeta silk, reaching full length to the floor and permitting no least ray of sunlight to escape outside. It was a studied effect, presenting to the world the aspect of utter darkness, where in reality the warm tide of life was at the flood. The doctor thought he saw the curtains at one of the windows move ever so slightly. A draught, perhaps.

"What do I expect of you?" murmured Georgia Dawn, nibbling idly at a wafer and searching him with her lustrous eyes. "Good sense, my dear doctor—always."

"And do I disappoint you?"

"Frightfully."

"I'm sorry. Is it something I can correct?"

"Most assuredly. That is why you are here."

He bowed.

"I am all attention."

She eyed him an instant.

"You lunched at the Van Tuysel today."

"My apologies," he protested promptly. "I give you my word, I did not see you."

"I was not there," was her cool retort, "but I believe at the end you received a note."

A quick light came to his eyes; a sudden sharpness to his perceptiveness. The Monk!

IN a veritable avalanche a whole new phase of thought poured upon him, forcing a quick succession of adjustments as he sought to connect Georgia Dawn with this band of criminals.

She noted the change in his expression.

"You did not choose to obey this warning. Instead, you consorted with the police, first at Dartmoor & Company, and then at headquarters."

"You have been correctly informed," he observed noncommittally, adopting his coolest professional manner.

"It is necessary you drop the case."

Her tone was casual to the point of impertinence, and for a long moment the doctor studied her amusedly.

"This is interesting," was his comment. "Tell me more."

"Well spoken, my friend!" she exclaimed. "There is much that you do not know!"

Fitting a cigaret into a long, amber holder, she lighted it and surveyed him archly.

"They have not told you that the Flame is missing—the Madrani Flame."

The Madrani Flame! His face betrayed nothing.

"And what makes you think I do not know?"

"Because my good friend, Mr. Solomon Stein, is afraid to admit that it is gone. He has told me all."

Like the key pieces in a puzzle, the mention of the Dartmoor manager in addition to The Monk brought a swift suggestion of the whole picture, even though details remained obscure.

"Mr. Stein is very confiding," he observed imperturbably.

"To me," she purred pleasantly. "He was bringing the Flame last night for me to see. Myself—and another. When he went to get it from the vault, it was gone. That salesman, Blackmer, had taken it."

It was this, then, that Stein had been withholding!

"And what if I should say that all this is no news to me," the doctor hazarded.

"Then I know you would be lying," she returned airily.

They measured each other a moment.

"I take it that you were planning to purchase the Flame?" suggested the doctor.

"A hundred and fifty carat diamond! My dear doctor, you flatter my bank account! Do you know what price Dartmoor has placed upon it?"

He shook his head.

"A cool million—provided a purchaser can be found. Dartmoor, of course, is merely acting as agent for the Maharajah of Madrani."

NOT for an instant did the doctor permit his agile mentality to be captured and held to the immediate situation by these revelations, surprising as they were. Each new fact that fell from the carmine-honeyed lips of the woman was swiftly examined in all its aspects and applied to phases of the problem far beyond the gray-and-gold room — phases, perhaps, which Georgia Dawn was entirely ignorant of.

At once the question arose, why had Darius Blackmer included the Flame among the articles he was taking to show Judge Forsythe? To be sure, the judge was a wealthy man, but no such wedding gift as the Flame was within his means!

The woman seemed communicative enough — voluble even. It was a mood that could be pressed to advantage.

"Is Mr. Stein in the habit of taking so valuable a gem from the vaults and carrying it about on his person—at night?"

"It is not a habit. Rather, a favor."

"To you?"

"How can you ask?"

"He struck me as a man with a keen sense of his responsibilities."

"You are quite correct. He is the soul of honesty. But he is also in love." She arched her eyebrows.

"And you took advantage of this weakness?"

She puffed lazily at her cigaret.

"He objected strenuously at first. But I insisted. One night last week he brought it, signing for it on the Dartmoor records. There was really nothing wrong about it, only he did not say anything to Dartmoor. Now the stone is gone, the records will be looked over, and explanations will be awkward, even if he isn't suspected of the theft. That is what he fears."

"But yourself," pressed the doctor. "Wasn't one examination enough?"

"Don't be absurd, my friend. Do you suppose that if Solomon Stein had brought the Flame here last night it would ever have found its way back to the Dartmoor vaults?"

She was brutally frank. But why affect concealment from one who knew only too well her inmost thoughts and inclinations, who had probed to the very depths of her being, one who could penetrate her artifices with a rapier acumen?

He grasped the thing in its entirety now. The old tendency which had originally brought Georgia Dawn to him had reasserted itself.

"There is," he suggested suavely, "another lover?"

She bowed.

It was Georgia Dawn's peculiar predilection to center her affections on men of little honor when satiated by the attentions of suitors from her own walk in life. She seemed to have been uncontrollably drawn to certain criminals of international repute, extracting from the association the febrile excitement her being craved. Her *amours* with masters of crime were perennial.

"You mean—The Monk?"

Again she bowed.

"You know him. Alfred Le Bouletier. Like myself, an old patient of yours, I believe."

CHAPTER X

DECISION

THE doctor had suspected as much.

"I was able to do *Monsieur* Le Bouletier a good turn once—in a strictly professional capacity," was his comment. "I believe he would have hanged otherwise."

"A good turn is all he asks now, doctor." Her tone was dangerously sweet.

"In just what way?"

"By dropping the case completely."

"But I have already accepted it."

"That does not matter. You can give it up. Pressure of other business, you know."

The doctor permitted himself a grim little smile.

"Without going into that point," he said, "would it be possible for you to tell me why you are so anxious that I drop the case?"

"Certainly. Because you have the intelligence to see through the whole thing. The police alone will never solve it. They'll send that taxi driver to the chair and think they've done their full duty. Meanwhile the Flame and the other jewels will have vanished completely."

"Then you know how this crime was committed?"

"We have very strong suspicions which we expect to confirm within a day or two. And if it really proves what we think it is, the Flame and the other jewels will be readily acquired by *Monsieur*."

"And this driver, Lawton, had nothing to do with it?"

She flicked her hand in a gesture of impatience.

"Absurd! Of course he didn't!"

"What is your theory, then? You must admit that the case has its puzzling features."

"Indeed, yes," she agreed noncommittally. "It was perfectly planned and perfectly executed. And *Monsieur* does not wish to disturb its perfection in the least degree. He merely desires to take fullest advantage of it—and relieve the present possessors of their stolen goods. That is why he objects to your activities. He wishes the police to continue completely in the dark."

An unwonted gravity came to Doctor Spong's eyes as he studied her.

"You understand, don't you, that this young man, Lawton, will go to the chair unless the crime is solved and the perpetrators apprehended?"

Her glance sought the floor whence a golden slipper idly traced the pattern in the rug.

"What is one man's life against *Monsieur's* desires?"

The doctor rose stiffly.

"I have saved men from execution, who, perhaps, deserved to die, but never have I been party to condemning an innocent man. I shall most certainly refuse in this instance."

"That is your final answer?" Her tone hardened as she rose with him. "Remember, we have laid our cards on the table. We have told you all. *Monsieur* will be forced to stern

measures if you turn informer to the police."

For an instant the doctor eyed her coolly, intently — then an amused gleam asserted itself.

"My dear Miss Dawn, like everything else you do, you threaten prettily. You know well enough that if I had a mind to go to the bottom of a case, I would not be deterred by the dangers involved. Besides, you have told me nothing—that is, nothing that implicates you. You merely were unable to put certain plans into effect. It appears that *Monsieur* was outwitted by another—one a little more clever than himself."

At this she bridled. He detected the signs of mounting floods of anger which would break in an uncontrolable transport.

"That is your answer, then? You refuse to drop the case?"

"Absolutely."

HE saw her flush as he turned toward the door to indicate unmistakably that the interview was over and he wished to depart. Then a voice came to him, a sharp, masculine voice in an unpleasant nasal:

"Is there nothing that would make you reconsider?"

He faced about.

"Monsieur Le Bouletier!"

"You recognize me?"

"Anywhere."

A tall, agile man stepped from behind a pair of window curtains—a man of lowering, jaundiced countenance, heavy, black eyebrows and twisted mouth.

"Your conversation has been enlightening," he conceded suavely, but there was an ill-concealed rasp in his voice that betrayed his true feelings. "Just why are you so interested in this case, doctor?"

Spong eyed the man steadily.

"I don't know that I have to answer that question," he retorted.

"No. And for a very good reason. You received a package this afternoon—a package brought by a small, red-haired man—did you not? Don't deny it!"

"You are quite correct."

The Frenchman cast pretense aside and advanced threateningly.

"And the contents of that package was—what? Eh?"

The doctor drew himself up and met the implied threat with a stolid silence.

"Ah, my friend, you do not answer. No! Some pearl necklaces, perhaps, and some diamond bracelets for your safe-keeping? Eh?"

The doctor's eyes widened despite himself. Was it sarcasm—or all seriousness? He was frankly puzzled. So menacing was the man's attitude now, so intense the anger flaming in his glance that Spong was impelled to the astonishing suspicion that beneath the sneer was a belief that the little red-haired man had actually delivered the jewels at his office!

The doctor was uncannily adroit in letting a false assumption simmer while he skimmed off the facts and motives that led to its formulation. If Le Bouletier was serious, then the red-haired man was not a member of The Monk's gang, and the lethal bomb was a blow from another quarter—from the gang that had outwitted the Frenchman! Then they, too, must know that Sergeant Vitelini had turned to Melancthon Spong, and they feared the doctor's penetrative mental powers sufficiently to try to dissuade him by violent methods! Such was the price he paid for a reputation.

"You will admit," said the doctor in calculated tones, "that jewels in my keeping would be entirely safe."

It was a reply with a double edge,

designed either to meet Le Bouletier's sarcasm, measure for measure, in case the red-haired man happened to be an emissary of his own, or to let him continue in ignorance if he did not really know what the nature of the package was.

The Frenchman advanced hostilely, his hands plunged deep in the pockets of his coat. The right one betrayed only too significantly the outline of his pistol.

"The Monk has a way of attaining his ends, my good friend," purred the man, poison in every syllable. "He who stands in his way is likely to drink bitter wine. With stakes like these, he will stop at nothing. It is an opportunity that comes but once. Consider well before you attempt to thwart him."

"I have considered," returned the doctor, unmoved. "You have my answer."

Bowing, he started toward the door, when again he was halted, this time by the ringing voice of Georgia Dawn.

"One moment, please!" she begged, laying a hand on his arm. "You do not realize!"

"I realize perfectly," he returned coldly. "As I might have suspected, your little after-theatre suppers are most interesting."

Without so much as a second glance at Le Bouletier, the doctor stepped into the reception-room, slipped on his coat, rang for the elevator, and, after a scrupulously courteous adieu to his hostess, glided silently to the street.

CHAPTER XI

WELCOME HOME

IT WAS two-thirty when Doctor Spong reached home. In the empty foyer burned a ruddy light left by the caretaker each night upon closing the outside door at twelve. Private phones and an automatic elevator rendered attendants unnecessary.

The doctor moved quickly to his own door. Habit enabled him to insert the key and swing wide the door almost without perceptible pause. Then, with a movement equally mechanical, he would throw coat and cane on a chair close by for Charlie to gather up in the morning, and make his way to the study, at the rear of which was a flight of stairs, leading, in duplex arrangement, to a suite of living-rooms on the floor above.

Tonight, as he started this familiar ritual, he suddenly checked himself. What was wrong? Then it came to him. The light that Charlie invariably left burning and under which Miss Dawson, the nurse, placed memoranda requiring immediate attention, was out! For an instant he hesitated—then stepped toward the table to switch it on.

Once clear of the door, he felt rather than saw it swing shut, cutting off the light from the foyer and plunging the room into total darkness. He stopped short midway to the table. Someone was in the room; some hand had noiselessly impelled the door; someone stood facing him in the dark. Le Bouletier? The Frenchman had been quick!

He thought he could hear breathing. He had a sense of someone creeping up in the dark. His hand stole toward the light on the table. Then came the crash. A flying mass struck his shoulders and bore him headlong to the floor.

Half-stunned, the doctor lashed out with his arms and hunched his shoulders to throw off his assailant. But the man had him pinned. He tried to find purchase for his feet. The rugs slid across the polished floor and gained him nothing. He gathered

himself for a herculean effort. Came a stinging jab in the back of his neck.

A hypodermic!

Instantly he ceased to struggle, summoning all his mental faculties in their highest concentration to neutralize the drug. He had once performed such a feat experimentally. He would now turn the trick to practical use.

Slowly he felt the hold of the man relax, deceived into believing the drug was having its normal effect. The doctor lay motionless. The weight on his shoulders diminished. He heard the man's light step on the floor, heard him pass into the study; heard him opening drawers and cupboards, rustling papers, poking in the fireplace, prowling first in one corner of the room, then in another.

The doctor waited—five—ten minutes until he was sure he had obtained the mastery of the drug. Perhaps in the dark his assailant's thrust had erred. At any rate, Spong felt himself in full possession of his senses.

He rose and stole to the door of the study. The light on the desk was burning. Its low shade cast deep shadows in all corners of the room. At the far end was a masked man of slender build. He seemed to be fumbling in a waste basket—or was it the shelves behind the books?

"What is it you seek, my friend?" asked the doctor calmly.

The man shot upright.

"Great God!" he cried aghast.

With a leap, he mounted the shelves, dived headlong through a window and fled up a fire-escape in a shower of glass.

Entering the room, the doctor pressed the wall switch that turned on all the lights. He pulled up with a start. In the big armchair before the fireplace sat Sergeant Vitelini!

CHAPTER XII

VITELINI REPORTS

"HELLO, doctor! That you? Thought I heard a crash. What time is it?"

"Three o'clock."

"Whew! Must have dozed off."

He yawned and began to rub his neck.

"Feels like something stung me!" he added.

The doctor stepped forward briskly and, without a word, examined the offending spot. There was a hint of chloroform in the air. He turned to a shelf behind and saw where a bottle of the liquid had been misplaced.

"What time did you come?" he asked.

"About eleven. Charlie let me in. Said you were at the theatre and would return any minute."

"And you made yourself at home?"

"Yes. I sat down in that chair to wait."

"And that's the last thing you remember—until I turned on the lights just now?"

He nodded.

"Well, young fellow my lad, I'll tell you what happened to you. While you were dozing, someone gave you a whiff of chloroform to keep you quiet while he shot some dope into you. He tried the same thing on me."

The sergeant stared.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Here—" He motioned toward the window whence the intruder had escaped.

The shattered glass told its own story.

"Did you go after him?"

"No. Not after seeing you sitting there. I'll admit you gave me something of a shock."

"I'll just take a look," cried the sergeant, now all activity.

He gingerly picked his way

through the shattered window and mounted the fire-escape.

DOCTOR SPONG cast his eyes about the room. If the sergeant had been doped, the effects would not have worn off for an hour or two at the least. Then the intruder could not have been Le Bouletier whom he had left at Georgia Dawn's apartment. If the Frenchman had sought to beat him home, he could not have done so by more than ten minutes with the hardest driving.

One of his agents, then, seeking a hidden safe where might have been placed the Madrani Flame and the other jewels he thought the red-haired man had delivered? Presumably. Entering by way of the fire-escape, the man had discovered the sergeant dozing, deepened his slumber with morphine, and then set himself to await the return of the doctor, postponing his search until he could be sure he would not be interrupted by the return of the owner.

And Le Bouletier, believing the red-haired man had left the gems, knew nothing of the gas bomb! This, then, had been the gift of the other faction! Verily, there was fire from two directions!

"What luck?" he queried as the sergeant appeared in the window.

"Not a thing."

"Hardly. Once he made the roofs, he could have ducked into any one of a dozen houses. But, unless I am mistaken, we shall hear from him again. Judging by his attitude when I appeared, I should gather that he did not find what he was looking for."

"And that was?" inquired the sergeant, as he watched Spong peering behind the waste-basket in the corner.

The doctor rose.

"Sit down, sergeant," he said. "I have much to tell you.. The night is as good as gone, and we may as well make a clean sweep of it. I'll rout out Charlie and have him make us a cup of coffee."

He disappeared upstairs, and a few minutes later descended, garbed in a comfortable dressing-gown. The yawning Jap was at his heels, dust-pan and broom in hand to gather up the shattered glass.

"First, tell me, sergeant, what brought you here?" The doctor seated himself in a big armchair and pulled his robe about him. "Something important has come up on your end?"

"In a way—yes. I thought I'd run in a moment and give you the facts, so you could sleep on them. I was able to locate a Wall Street bond house through which this Judge Forsythe deals. They are familiar with his finances. They told me he has been practically wiped out in a stock jobbing scheme. He's had to hypothecate every security he could lay his hands on."

"How about his place—Bonny Gables?"

"Mortgaged to the hilt! And yet he was buying pearl necklaces!"

The doctor, having lighted a pipe, puffed calmly and nodded.

"To keep up appearances, sergeant. Many a man is forced to that. Probably his daughter knows nothing of his straightened circumstances. And what else have you? You searched Blackmer's apartment?"

"Yes. A two room and bath affair—furnished. I had a long talk with the woman who takes care of the place. He led a routine bachelor's life; early to bed and no dissipations. One of the clerks at the store with whom he occasionally had dinner corroborated this. Incidentally, the landlady has received instructions to pack his things and ship them to Bordentown, Ohio. The re-

mains were forwarded after the inquest this morning."

"And what of the Brightside Auto Hire Company?"

"The call from Dartmoor's came through in routine fashion. There was a special request for Lawton, however. He had driven for them before and was considered especially reliable."

"What time was the call put in."

"Nine o'clock Wednesday morning."

"Four hours and a half ahead of time," mused Spong. "Perhaps that was to make sure of having Lawton. No other indication of what the nature of the errand was to be?"

"Not the slightest. According to the starter, the call might have been for a matinee, a shopping trip or sight-seeing for an out-of-town customer. A driver seldom knows what is expected of him or how long he is to be gone."

"Not unusual, I suppose. Did you go over their list of patrons?"

"Hurriedly—yes. It's a long one. The company is used freely by prominent people. The biggest percentage seem to be doctors."

"I know. Many find it cheaper to hire than own."

"But that may explain one thing."

"Yes?"

"The tip of the hypodermic needle in the rug of the purple limousine."

"Ah," mused the doctor. "To be sure. The hypodermic needle."

His eyes narrowed as he pondered a moment. Then:

"And the man who was following you—what of him?"

"Lost. The operative trailed him as far as Lower Broadway, but lost him in the crowds."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall and slender, with a slight lift to the right shoulder. The operative did not risk getting close. Would that description fit the man who was in here?"

"It might," mused the doctor, sucking dreamily on his pipe. "It might. And now let me make my report."

In a light, rather bantering manner, though omitting no essential detail, he described his encounter with Georgia Dawn and its dramatic developments.

"The Madrani Flame!" gasped Vitelini, his eyes popping. "Surely Judge Forsythe, in his bankrupt condition, would never want to buy a wedding present like that! Why should Blackmer take it?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and made no answer. Whereupon, Vitelini, struck by another angle, snapped:

"How do they know that he did take it?"

"That," replied Spong, "will be the next point to establish."

CHAPTER XIII

THE JUDGE EXPRESSES HIMSELF

BACKED to the wall, the damning evidence obtained from what source he knew not, Solomon Stein wiped the cold moisture from his brow and surrendered.

"Why have you not told Mr. Dartmoor?" pressed Spong, who, with Vitelini at his elbow, had cornered the manager in his private office at the Fifth Avenue store.

"It would kill him," replied the manager, licking his parched lips. "It would ruin him. I wanted to make sure. I thought it might have been misplaced in the vault. I have gone through everything myself. It is not there."

"Are you certain that Blackmer took it?"

"He was the only man in the store who knew exactly where it was kept

and who had access to the vault. It must have been he—if not myself. Of course, I realize that I cannot escape suspicion with my name on the records as having taken it out before, a thing which Mr. Dartmoor would never have permitted."

He stopped short and bit his lips, his pallor deepening by the minute. It was torture for the man. This was plain. A scrupulously honest employe, who would sooner cut off an arm than steal, he felt himself being implicated in a despicable robbery. The thought overwhelmed him.

The doctor sensed something of his mental agony and hastened to reassure him. The man's distress and his intention to bring the Flame to Georgia Dawn's apartment for a second time, only to discover its loss when he went to get it, indicated only too clearly his freedom from all complicity.

"I think we can assure you that you are not under suspicion in this case," put in the doctor. "We have facts in our possession which seem to clear you. They cannot be revealed at the moment. All we ask of you is the whole story, complete and without reservations."

Whereupon Stein capitulated. He corroborated everything Georgia Dawn had told—so far as his part went. The doctor mercifully refrained from informing him that it was all only a crude plot to steal the gem. He would have to have his own awakening in respect to the woman who had schemed to use him so cruelly.

"You are satisfied, then, that Blackmer slipped that magnificent diamond of the Maharajah's in his bag along with the necklaces?"

"There seems no other explanation of its disappearance."

"But Judge Forsythe was not a possible purchaser, was he?"

"Hardly. There are few men, even in America, who can afford to own a gem like that. It is possible that he merely wanted to show it to the judge. They were good friends."

"But he did not sign for it on the books."

"He would not have dared. He was taking chances, like myself. Perhaps that is why he was so particular about having Lawton lock the limousine doors."

Spong frowned.

"How long has Judge Forsythe been a customer of Dartmoor & Company?"

"Many years. But of late he has bought little. I don't recall an important sale for a year or more."

"H'm," mused the doctor. "That's interesting. Suppose, sergeant, we run out to Bonny Gables and have a talk with him. Incidentally, we might call an automobile from the Brightside Company and check up on their system—if Mr. Stein will permit us the use of his phone."

FIFTEEN minutes later, another Brightside limousine might have been seen leaving Dartmoor & Company for Bonny Gables, forty-eight hours, almost to the minute, from the time of Blackmer's departure on his tragic errand. But this time the doors of the car were not locked; neither were the curtains drawn.

The question that had long been on Vitelini's lips popped out once he and the doctor were seated.

"Do you think the judge specially requested Blackmer to bring the Flame to Bonny Gables?"

The doctor did not answer at first. His head was bent in thought.

"It seems hardly possible that Blackmer would have taken it on his own initiative—just to make a display. A curiosity of the nature is not something to be bandied about like a circus freak. To curry favor with

the judge, who had heard the thing described and asked to see it, might be the motive. Blackmer would have salved his conscience on the ground that it was all part of the firm's business."

"But in that case, why would he conceal his intentions?"

"He would know well enough that Dartmoor would never permit it. The issue is simply one of a clerk going beyond the bounds to strengthen his hold on his personal clientele."

"And the judge, having persuaded Blackmer to bring out the stone—knowing just the hour he was coming, and himself standing on the verge of bankruptcy—what then?"

"What then, indeed?" observed the doctor noncommittally. "You may well ask, my friend."

Tapping on the window, he ordered the driver to stop.

"I want to send a telegram," he explained, and, opening the door, departed briskly toward a branch telegraph office in the block they had just passed.

A suddenly recalled appointment which he must cancel? Vitelini did not know. The doctor had his private affairs which needed an occasional thought.

When he returned, he had a newspaper in his hand.

"I see they've indicted Lawton," was his comment as he scanned the headlines.

"Yes. The court is sitting and they're going to rush the case to make an example of him as a check to the crime wave."

The doctor read the opening paragraphs of the account.

"The newspapers will turn a somersault when they hear about the Madrani Flame. Lawton won't be the only man to suffer. Stein will go under with the crash—and perhaps Dartmoor, too."

He folded the paper and fell silent. The interlude continued unbroken until they swung into the entrance of Bonny Gables, each engrossed with his own thoughts and chary of interrupting the other.

The judge, warned by phone of their coming, was at the door to greet them.

"Glad to see you, doctor," he cried cordially, offering his hand for a hearty grip. "Come in! Come in! After you, sergeant! Right this way!"

He nodded toward a sumptuously appointed living-room, where, at an open hearth, a wood-fire crackled merrily. There was little about the man to indicate that he was in the grip of a severe financial crisis. Certainly to the world he was maintaining a bold front.

"Got you interested in this murder case, have they?" he queried. "That Lawton's a tough one, isn't he? Can't seem to budge him on what he did with the jewels. You'd think with a death sentence hanging over him he'd come through. I suppose it's on account of his wife. She must know all about it. Must have been accomplices, you know."

He offered cigars and joined Spong and Vitelini before the fire.

"Yes," muttered the doctor between puffs. "The jewels seem to have disappeared utterly. It is about them we wished to talk with you. Just what were the circumstances of him bringing them out? A wedding present for your daughter? That is correct?"

The judge nodded assent.

"Quite so," he said.

"And you indicated the articles you wished to have him bring?"

"Yes. Necklaces and bracelets—just a small assortment. He knew our tastes pretty well."

"And that was all—just the necklaces and bracelets?"

The keen eyes of Vitelini were not

a whit sharper than those of the doctor as he watched the judge's face.

"Why, yes," returned the jurist without perceptible pause—and then, sensing the import of the question: "Is there something else involved?"

There could, of course, be no evading of an answer to this question, and the doctor attempted none.

"This is quite confidential," he said. "I am unable to go into full detail. But it appears that there is a valuable gem missing. The supposition is that Blackmer had it with him. You, yourself, had not asked him to bring anything of this nature?"

"Indeed, no!" returned the judge emphatically.

"Nor your daughter?"

"Not to my knowledge. Here, I'll call her."

He stepped to a window and motioned to the girl, who could be seen directing a gardener in some work on the grounds outside. She appeared shortly, her expression an interrogation-point.

"YOU remember Dr. Spong, Rosamunde — and the sergeant." She smiled a gracious recognition as the judge presented her. "There seems to be a question of other articles missing at Dartmoor's. Did you have any communication with Mr. Blackmer in regard to bringing out anything in addition to what I suggested?"

The girl shook her head.

"No. The only time I talked with him was Monday. I merely took the message."

"It was you, then, who phoned him to come to Bonny Gables?" inquired the doctor.

"Oh, no," broke in the judge, "I did that! I talked with him myself Monday morning and suggested what he should bring. We had planned to have him out that afternoon."

"And something intervened?"

"Yes. He called up that afternoon to say that it would be impossible for him to come, and suggested Wednesday afternoon. As it happened, it made little difference to us."

"I see," mused the doctor. "Unforeseen developments, I suppose." He paused. "Had you ever talked with Mr. Blackmer about examining any of Dartmoor's fine stones—say, unset diamonds?"

The judge and his daughter passed a quick glance.

"Why—I don't know," returned the jurist. "It seems to me I have heard him mention the subject. He was quite a connoisseur. I think once he did say something about dropping in the store after hours some time when we were in town and he'd show us their collection of fine gems. Do you recall, Rosamunde?"

"I can't say that I do," she replied.

"Oh, well," the doctor observed easily, "it doesn't matter. You're looking well, judge."

"Feeling fit as a fiddle. You did a good job, doctor. Hasn't been a sign of the old trouble."

"Good! Fine! And now I fear we must be off. I was anxious to have a talk with you and clear up a point or two. But I am sure the sergeant is impatient to get back to town. We have much work to do, if we are to save Lawton from the chair."

The judge straightened.

"Save Lawton from the chair!" he exclaimed. "Surely, if any murderer deserves the extreme penalty, it is he!"

The doctor, reaching for his hat on the table in the reception hall, paused significantly.

"There appears to be a little doubt as to whether he is the guilty man," he observed.

The judge's eyes popped.

"Doubt!" he ejaculated—almost hostilely, Vitelini thought—"why, in

all my days on the bench, I never encountered a clearer case of guilt!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE THUNDERBOLT

VITELINI recalled afterward how an air of suppressed excitement seemed to hover about the doctor all the way back to town. Plainly the interview had uncovered some striking fact or suggested a lead which he was not prepared to divulge.

"I want to look over the situation at the Brightside Auto Hire Company," he announced as they turned into Fifth Avenue. "It's now six o'clock. You run down to headquarters and get a line on the afternoon's developments and I'll go to the garage with the driver. Join me for dinner at my house at seven-thirty. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall have news."

As he boarded the train at the subway station where they had dropped him, the sergeant had the indefinable sense of being close upon a quarry that had not broken cover. New hope for his friend, Troy Lawton, made his step lighter than it had been for several days when he ran up the steps to headquarters and sought the detective bureau.

The news that awaited him there sent him bounding to the telephone. The red-haired man who had left the gas bomb had been spotted and trailed to an 86th Street address! Vitelini was in all haste to impart this information to the doctor. Learning from the Jap, who answered the phone, that Spong had not yet returned, the sergeant hastened back uptown to be on hand when he reached home.

He overtook the physician striding along at a brisk pace a few doors from his apartment.

"They've located him!" he burst out as Spong, sensing someone pursuing him, faced about abruptly. "The red-haired man!"

"So?"

They fell into step and the sergeant recounted the details.

"We'll snatch a bite to eat and then run up and look the place over," said the doctor. "Having the place watched?"

"There's someone ready to take up the trail the moment he comes out."

They turned into the cozy foyer leading to the doctor's apartment. The door to the patient's reception-room stood ajar. Voices emerged—a man's and a woman's. The latter was that of Miss Dawson, the attendant nurse. The other, that of a stranger. Or was it a stranger?

The doctor, hastening to admit himself by a further door which he used when the office was filled with patients, caught the inflexion of the man's voice and stopped short. Then, motioning to Vitelini to follow, he moved noiselessly down the foyer to an alcove whence they could see without being seen.

The two waited, ears alert, for the man's departure, which, judging by the words they had overheard, he was on the point of doing. In a moment he appeared, a slight, tall man, whose back only could they see. His jaunty carriage seemed to indicate more a social caller than a patient.

"Who was our friend?" inquired Spong of the nurse as soon as the two entered the office.

"Dr. Jasper, lecturer on gastro-enterology at the Hayden Institute."

"Oh!" ejaculated the doctor. "That may explain it. I thought his voice sounded familiar. I suppose I have met him. What did he want?"

"He has a case which he wishes to turn over to you. Stiles—Perlman Stiles."

"The railroad president?"

"Yes. He has been under Dr. Jas-

per's care for a stomach difficulty for some weeks. The doctor has come to believe there is a mental cause behind it, and wants to send him to you."

The doctor smiled and handed coat and hat to Charlie, who had come up.

"Dr. Jasper has something to learn. He will call again, I take it?"

"Yes—or phone."

"Good. And now, sergeant, a bite. What do you say?" Then, to the Jap: "I fear you have two hungry men tonight, Charlie. And afterward we must be off, pronto."

IT was an hour later when they dismissed the taxi driver at the corner of 86th Street and started afoot to reconnoitre the place where the red-haired man had vanished. The sergeant had his eyes out for the department operative, and quickly picked him up in the shadows of the basement entrance to a private house. Here the three went into conference.

"No sign of him yet?" asked the sergeant.

"Not a peep."

"What do you make of it? That his home?"

"Must be where he eats. He went in at four-thirty. It's eight-thirty now."

"Just which house is it?" put in the doctor.

"The one with the brass handrails."

"Private house, isn't it?"

"May be—or a rooming-house. Six or eight went in between five and six. Some have come out since. They may be patients. There's a doctor's office on the first floor."

"A doctor?" Spong's voice rose. "Let's go closer, sergeant."

They crossed the street, their eyes fastened on the house with the brass handrails. As they came abreast of it, the sergeant felt the doctor's hand in a sudden grip.

"Look!" he cried excitedly, pointing to a window on the first floor.

In the corner was a small ground-glass sign with the name Park Jasper, M.D.

"Dr. Jasper!" ejaculated Vitelini.

"The same," snapped Spong, and paused an instant in thought before he burst forth in a sharp staccato: "Sergeant, have your operative arrest that red-haired man the moment he appears. I think he will be able to give us some important information. But don't let the newspapers get wind of his arrest—not for another twenty-four hours."

He hailed a passing taxi.

"We'll go back to the office and see what the medical directory has to say about this man Jasper," he went on. "You can phone headquarters from there."

He held open the door of the taxi while Vitelini ran across the street to give the operative his orders. He was back in a twinkling and the two sped away.

At the office, the doctor found a telegram awaiting him.

"Ah!" he cried, as he read it. "Here is news, sergeant!"

He handed the message to his companion. It read:

Have made investigation according to instructions you wired. The body is not that of Darius Blackmer. Relatives now see mistake. Facial resemblance striking, but Blackmer had long scar on knee received in accident when a boy. Holding body at your orders.

BROUGHTON,
Chief of Police, Bordentown, O.

Vitelini looked up aghast.

"Not Blackmer!" he stammered. "Then whose body is it?"

"That," returned the doctor, "is a point to be determined."

"The inspector ought to know this!"

"Right! You skip down and break

the news." Then, as the sergeant opened the door: "And when you get that red-haired man in custody, look and see if he has a scar on the knee."

CHAPTER XV

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

YOUNG Doctor Jasper was nervous. That was evident the moment he entered the big purple limousine. Perhaps he thought Doctor Spong would appear in an impressive car of his own —something really regal, with liveried chauffeur and footman as befitted a celebrated psychiatrist going to call on a millionaire patient. Rolling up to the door of the mighty Perlman Stiles in a hired vehicle was something of a gaucherie for a society doctor who has swank, if nothing else.

"You find hiring more economical than owning," he observed as the door closed and they started away.

"Ah!" purred Spong. "You recognize the car, do you?"

Jasper flushed as though he regretted the attempt to make conversation.

"Oh, yes!" he finally replied. "I use hired cars entirely. It's hard to find chauffeurs who will keep doctors' hours. As to driving yourself, the parking problem makes it impossible."

There was a momentary pause, then Spong went on:

"I was sorry to be delayed. Will we be in time? It's not more than one-thirty, is it?"

Doctor Jasper looked at his wrist watch and gave a confirmatory reply.

"The drive to the Stiles place," pressed Spong. "Does it take more than an hour?"

"Not if traffic is light and we can make time."

"An important consideration, to be sure. Now let me have the history of the case so far as it has come to you. You were called in as a stomach specialist, I gather."

"Yes—on recommendation of Dr. Prefontaine of Bellevue. You are acquainted with him, I dare say."

"Oh, yes—yes, indeed!"

Whereupon Jasper launched into a pathological description of the case, including several unique points of clinical interest. The recitation was punctuated by Spong's persistent attention to the traffic. He was continually craning his neck, peering out the windows. Finally he broke out with a petulant:

"What's the matter with this driver? He can't seem to get by that car!"

Thus called to his attention, Jasper's eyes sought the obstructing machine. Instantly he sat back and dragged furiously at his cigaret. Ahead of them sped a purple limousine, identical with their own as to color, make and model.

Ignoring his companion's discomfiture, Spong, with a technical question, set going again the theme of Perlman Stiles.

For as much as ten minutes the conversation proceeded along professional lines until Spong, suddenly slapping his pockets, tapped on the window and ordered the driver to pull up at the next corner.

"My cigarets!" he explained.

"Here. Have one of mine?" proffered Jasper, reaching for his case.

"Thanks! But I have a special brand. It won't take but a moment."

The car stopped on the corner, and at Spong's request the driver darted into the cigar store. One corner cigar store in the teeming metropolis is much like another. Doctor Jasper glanced out the window—and started. He looked further, and visibly paled.

What a coincidence! It was the very corner where, on the Wednes-

day afternoon previous, that Dartmoor's salesman, Blackmer, had despatched his driver, Lawton, for a package of cigarets! And the hour—two p.m.! It was the same! And there drawn up at the curb just ahead of them was the car they had been unable to pass—a purple limousine, identical with their own! And its curtains were all down!

Doctor Jasper swallowed hard. He shot a furtive glance at Spong, then he lifted his hand toward the door.

"I—I—" he stuttered as though to make some excuse for leaving the car.

He was cut short by a stern voice at the window. Three men seemed to have arisen from nowhere—two big, burly giants, with a third between them—a small man with red hair.

"Is that Doctor Jasper?" thundered one of the giants, pointing his finger in a frenzied gesture of accusation.

"Yes," stammered the little man, whereupon the two led him away.

Doctor Jasper was colorless.

"Blackmer! You dog!" he screamed.

"It's no use, my good fellow," put in Spong calmly. "He has confessed."

"Confessed!" shrieked Jasper, stunned, terrified. "I didn't murder him, I tell you! I didn't murder him!"

"Who said you did? Now you tell your side of it."

The door on the street side opened. In climbed Sergeant Vitelini and an operative from the detective bureau. The driver reappeared. Orders were given to drive to police headquarters.

CHAPTER XVI

RE-ENTER MR. BLACKMER

"JASPER very probably is right," observed Dr. Spong to Sergeant Vitelini.

The third degree was over, the final fact had been uncovered, and the two had repaired to a small restaurant for dinner.

"Strictly speaking, it might be murder," the doctor went on. "For several days the man had been kept alive solely by opiates. The hospital records bear that out. Jasper merely stopped the dosage and let nature take its course."

"But how did he manage to get hold of that body? Isn't there a law governing such matters?"

"Most assuredly. But evidently, my friend, you have little appreciation of the power of the medical fraternity to batter down all doors in the name of scientific research. The doctor speaks, and the state bends the knee.

"The man passed on at noon. Jasper asked for an autopsy and a transfer of the body to the Hayden Institute, where he has a class in gastroenterology. The man was a charity patient, picked up on the docks. There were no relatives. The hospital authorities promptly signed the necessary release.

"In order that there should be no delay in getting the case before the class, the doctor elected to have the removal made in the hired limousine and confederate driver he had waiting, instead of by the morgue car, which was not immediately available. A tip to the hospital attendants would suffice to arrange a detail like that.

"Once in the car, with the curtains drawn, everything else was easy. The facial abrasion was contrived to obscure identification in case that point arose, which was most unlikely under the circumstances of the locked doors and the driver almost continually in attendance. The relatives in Ohio were distant ones whom Blackmer had not seen for years. They would be disposed to accept the situation and impute any lack of recognition to natural changes.

"With the man dressed in Black-

mer's clothes, all Jasper and his confederate driver had to do was trail the car driven by Lawton with Blackmer locked inside. At the cigar store where Lawton stopped with engine running, they switched cars, driving away with Blackmer, and leaving an identical car with its gruesome passenger for Lawton to drive to Bonny Gables."

He paused, and the sergeant, engrossed in twining a foot of festive spaghetti around his fork, had, for the moment, no other thought. Finally he looked up:

"At what point did you become convinced of the correct solution?"

"I was not convinced until the telegram from Bordentown repudiated the identification. Up to that time it had all been a working hypothesis, the only alternative, if Lawton was not guilty. Once adopted, each new fact uncovered supported it astonishingly.

"THE disappearance of the Flame was a definite slant in the direction of Blackmer. Then, too, it was at his request that the visit to Bonny Gables was postponed for two days — to allow time for Jasper's machinations at the hospital, undoubtedly. Further postponement could have been arranged if it had been necessary. The judge and his daughter seemed to know nothing of the Flame, whatever might have been the judge's private intentions with respect to the jewels Blackmer was supposed to be delivering for his inspection."

Spong's slight smile was whimsical.

"My interview with the Brightside Auto Hire Company revealed a fleet of limousines — remodeled second-hand ones, to be sure, but many of them identical in make and color. It is not the custom for drivers to stick to any one car. They jump from open to closed as a patron orders. Hence it is not surprising that Lawton failed to notice the substitution of cars at the cigar store, as he might have had he been familiar with the running peculiarities of one certain car. The drivers have master keys fitting all the closed cars, enabling them to lock up a patron's belongings and park the car in case of a day's outing in the country or at the shore. Lawton's keys would open one car as well as another."

"But after it was established that Blackmer was living," Vitelini interposed, "you still had the problem of the identity of the body in the purple limousine?"

"True. But you remember our first clue was the broken tip of a hypodermic needle in the car. The wrapper on the bomb left at my office had the label of a well-known instrument company. The register of the Brightside company showed many physicians on the list. The assailant who attacked us in my office was handy with a hypodermic needle. All this clearly pointed in a medical direction. Add the well-known fact that doctors have access to bodies for dissecting and autoptical purposes and a promising line of inquiry opens up.

"Of course, we should have had an intricate trail to follow through the morgue and the hospitals had not Jasper overreached himself in his amateurish efforts to force me out of the case. That's what comes of having an international reputation for solving baffling crimes, sergeant. Perhaps you are wise in not cultivating one."

The doctor grinned mischievously, but Vitelini refused to rise.

"I thought I recognized Jasper's voice when we reached my office last night and found him talking with the nurse. But I couldn't place it. Having failed to bomb me out of the case, he thought he could bait me with a millionaire patient. That night he jabbed

us, the shock of seeing me brought a curse to his lips just before he dived through the window.

"We now know he had been looking for the wrapper in which the bomb had been sent. He had used the label of the instrument company, hoping to get it direct to me and knock me out for a few days at least—long enough to get the false Blackmer safely out of the way in Ohio and minimize the chances for identification. It came to him that this same label might be a means of laying a trail to the door of his own office, so he sought to recover it.

"Blackmer, having shaved his mustache and dyed his hair, was safe from recognition when all the world supposed him dead. Your operative, who picked him up on the street and followed him to Jasper's office on the chance that he might be the red-haired man who left the bomb at my place, simplified matters for us immensely. But in the end we would have trapped him through Jasper, just as we trapped Jasper through him. The key to the whole situation, of course, lay in the fact that Blackmer was still living and a substitute limousine had been palmed off on Lawton."

"Who is now enjoying a square meal in his own home, thanks to you," observed the sergeant. "But what of The Monk? Did he see through it?"

"Undoubtedly. He had the jump on us by knowing that Blackmer had secretly included the Flame in his bag of loot. It was one of his men who trailed you to headquarters that first afternoon after leaving Dartmoor's. Le Bouletier himself might have followed Blackmer as he trailed me through the park, perhaps as though seeking to overtake me, and having lost me, saw him return and deliver the package at my office.

"Trust The Monk to keep on the scent until he had located where Blackmer was living, uncovered the connection with Doctor Jasper and called the turn on the whole situation. He planned to snap up the jewels at his leisure. But he was not quick enough and all is safely back in the Dartmoor vaults."

"And Solomon Stein sleeps again."

SPONG nodded slowly.

"Another week, and I fear Doctor Jasper would have unobtrusively closed his office and departed for foreign shores—to pursue his medical researches at foreign universities, accompanied by a red-haired secretary with a small black bag. There is nothing like a private fortune, sergeant, to make a doctor independent of his practice and free to cull the laurels of fame where they sprout the thriftiest. That is a point on which I can speak with authority."

"They were probably plotting the thing a long time."

"Months — years, perhaps. Blackmer laid the foundation with Lawton and the locked doors and drawn curtains when he went into the suburbs. They had only to wait for a patient of the right size and complexion and the trap could be sprung. And New York hospitals are many and large and you can take your pick of types.

"But speaking of patients, I must hurry along. I have been neglecting my own people. Come up some evening and smoke a cigar, Sergeant. You know, we always have a few tips to trade."

So saying, he rose and, after a cordial handshake, made his way to the door. Vitelini, left alone, gazed soulfully at a plate of steaming spaghetti a waiter placed on the table opposite, and declaring an armistice in the great diet war, commanded Giuseppi to repeat the order.

In the Rush Hour

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

FIVE o'clock. The Grand Central.

Long, tiled underground passages. Muddy marble steps. Skiddy ramps.

From street and subway, hotels and office buildings, through a thousand swinging and revolving doors poured a seemingly inexhaustible, headlong throng of commuters, banker and clerk, matinee girl and stenographer.

Hustle, bustle, rustle.

Suddenly, above the muffle of voices and shuffle of feet out through the great arched concourse of the massive station shrilled a girl's wild cry.

"Maizie! Call the emergency hospital—quick! Help! Police!"

One little stream of the crowd forgot its homeward rush. Here was trouble, tragedy. It turned from frantic converging on the train gates toward the telephone booths and the cry.

Before a booth, over the body of a young girl prone before her, stood a little telephone operator, almost hysterical, calling to another girl at the switchboard.

"Here! I'm a doctor!"

Mary Mannix pushed her way through the crowd. In an instant she was leaning over the girl on the station floor.

"I just left the switchboard," cried the little operator with a frantic look back toward the now jangling buzzers, "to tell this girl I had her call, and to answer it. I flashed the light in her booth, but she didn't pay any attention. I tapped on the glass door, but she didn't answer that. She seemed huddled in the corner, crouched, bent over. Then I opened the door. She just slid out on the floor. I couldn't even catch her. Oh!"

Mary was looking carefully at the girl lying on the floor before her. Her hat had dropped off her boyish bobbed hair, revealing a face of unusual dark beauty, a well-shaped head crowned with dark curling locks.

The unwinking eyes, still open, were large and brown, and must have been appealing when she was herself. Her brows were daintily arched. Long lashes cast shadows over her olive cheeks. The nose was pert, slightly retroussé, and the mouth rather hard, whether from pain or revealing something in her past life.

The girl was daintily dressed. The day had been sultry, with a heat unappeased even by a light rain. Her thin gown of soft dark-blue crepe touched with white at the throat lay in soft folds about her slender body. Black suede pumps over the sheerest silk stockings revealed the slender beauty of her tiny feet and trim ankles.

"Stand back! Give this girl some air—please!" Mary spoke sharply over her shoulder to the curious crowd as she felt the pulse of the girl. She frowned and looked about quickly.

Still clutched in the girl's hand was a handbag. The little mirror hung on a narrow silk tape just below the catch. A quick rip and the mirror was off.

Leaning over the girl while the crowd gaped, Mary held the mirror to the girl's mouth and nose.

"No vapor! Not the least trace!"

Mary was looking closely at the girl's lips, startled and puzzled.

"She's dead!"

There she was lying on her back on the cold floor of the station, big eyes still open, staring into the unknown.

Mary closed the eyes, gently.

MORE and more people had collected; a quiet, sympathetic, helpless crowd, waiting the arrival of and the confirmation by the railroad terminal emergency hospital doctor.

Through the throng a young fellow in a green cap pushed his way. He looked closely at the dead girl.

"Why, that girl was at the Message Exchange not ten minutes ago! I remember her."

Mary turned. "Are you in charge of the booth?"

"No. Just a messenger."

"What did she do?"

"Asked if a message had been left for her."

"Do you remember the name?"

"Sure. I think it was Julia King."

"And was there a message?"

"Yes; in a big envelope. She stood there a moment and read it. Then she wrote something on some papers, legal-looking papers. Rested them on the corner of the desk when she wrote. I remember because she borrowed a pen. She sealed another envelope and left it to be called for just as she had called."

Mary was on her feet in an instant. A special policeman of the station had arrived by this time and established a line to keep back the crowd.

"Would you recognize the envelope?"

"I think so."

"Take me over to the Message Exchange, then, quick and pick it out."

At the booth were several people claiming and leaving messages. The messenger made a hasty search through all the envelopes and parcels to be called for.

"I can't find it. Say, Jim, do you remember anything about an envelope left here by that sporty little flapper who said she was Julia King?"

"Called for. A man asked for it, giving the name Whitney, not five minutes after she left the booth. Why?"

"She just dropped dead over there in a telephone booth!"

"What!"

Jim paused at least ten or twelve seconds, then went back to work. He saw people throw fits, go into hysterics, pull all sorts of stunts with diseases, but they seldom died. However, this was in some other department. Jim went on with his work.

"What did the man look like?" insisted Mary.

"Rather short—well-dressed," returned Jim.

"Would you recognize him?"

"If you could find him."

Mary was perplexed. What was she to do now? This had seemed such a straight way to find out something about the girl. She turned to the messenger in the green cap.

"Did you notice anything else Julia King did? Think, quick."

He shoved back his cap thoughtfully.

"Well, she read some note enclosed in that letter."

"Yes," urged Mary, her own eyes sparkling with excitement. "What did she do then? Keep it? Put it in the other envelope she left here?"

"No . . . Oh, I remember. She crumpled it up — dropped it in the basket, I think."

Mary glanced about, caught sight of the waste-basket. She upturned the basket on the marble desk and searched.

BUT there was nothing there, not a scrap that showed a thing about Julia

King. A curious crowd collected even here, wondering what it could be all about, why a pretty girl should be messing around a waste-basket in the Grand Central.

"Are you sure she dropped it into the basket?"

"It might have gone on the floor."

Mary looked around. Far down the line she saw a porter sweeping the floor. He would scarcely have been trying to sweep at this end with that hurrying stream of humanity interfering.

With the messenger in the green cap Mary started to search, eagerly scanning the floor for any stray bit of waste-paper. Back and forth they made their way, to the annoyance of the crowds hurrying for Westchester trains—back and forth, searching the floor.

Mary was so engrossed in her search that she did not pay much attention to the people in the crowding throng. She remembered later that she had caught sight of one man, a slight acquaintance, Harper Perry. He was walking up and down as if waiting for someone. She did not think of it at the time, but it seemed as if he turned a little abruptly in his walk, away from her, as if avoiding recognition.

At last, almost up to one of the train gates, Mary spied a crumpled ball of paper that had been kicked along by the crowd. She smoothed it out anxiously, then deciphered it with a gasp:

Here's the $10,000—ten one thousand dollar bills, as agreed. Sign the affidavit and release, seal them in the addressed envelope, leave it at the message exchange, and telephone 3578 FitzRoy that it is there.

The note was not signed.

"Wasn't there something else in that package besides the envelope she sealed?" demanded Mary.

The messenger thought a moment.

"Oh, yes. There were two envelopes in the message. I forgot. She peeked into one, and I saw her shove it into her handbag. It was the other she sealed."

Mary turned abruptly, hurried back to the crowd about the telephone booth and its secret. The emergency doctor had arrived.

As he was completing his examination, Mary picked up the girl's handbag again, examining it thoroughly. There was no envelope in it. She remembered now she had seen none when she opened it first.

The ten thousand dollars were gone.

Mary turned to the telephone operator. "Did any one speak to her, in the booth?" she asked suddenly.

"Why—yes—come to think of it. It must have been booth seven. Someone did open the door. There was a big crowd waiting for booths and numbers. Every coin-box booth was full, too."

"Who opened the door? A short man?"

"No. Rather tall. In a soft hat."

"You'd know him?"

"I don't know," rather doubtfully. "Maybe."

Keenly Mary was now inspecting the booth, the instrument, the walls, the floor. She betrayed nothing. But she had picked up, on the floor of the telephone booth, an imported French lipstick, a bit softened and twisted, worn down, jagged, on one side.

She happened to glance in, as the light struck where her shadow had been an instant before. Plainly, at that angle, there was something on the wall of the booth, thick, gummy lines, near the bottom. She took the corner of her handkerchief, rubbed off a bit of it. A red smudge on her handkerchief! She put the handkerchief and the misshapen lipstick into her own handbag.

A moment later Mary was bending

over with the emergency doctor. He looked up. "She's been poisoned!" he exclaimed under his breath to Mary. "I'll bet it was that man who opened the door to the booth!"

Mary shook her head. "That poison is on her lips, I think. Cyanide! An old trick. Not a word! My name is Dr. Mary Mannix. I'd like you to follow the autopsy, and let me know in the morning what was found on her lips."

"Delighted to do so, Miss Mannix." The doctor nodded.

Aside, Mary was closely examining the handbag again, speaking in an undertone to the doctor. "She went to the telephone, just after she had sealed an envelope that was probably doctored with cyanide. The poison began to work. That person opened the door, reached in, took something from her handbag, closed the door, and disappeared. She was dead in the booth, then. Someone was waiting for her to die, waiting for the poison to act!"

In ten minutes Julia King had received ten thousand dollars, had been killed and robbed—at the peak of the evening rush hours, with thousands of persons about, crowding through the station within a few feet of her—poisoned and directed, as if by the long arm of Fate, to go to a telephone booth—to die!

MARY turned the handbag over to the special officer. Who was the girl calling? The little telephone operator had the number written on her sheet; 3578 FitzRoy! That was a clue. There had been two others in the handbag. On a card was written the name, Whitney, and after it, 1922 Terminal Bldg. Whitney had been the name given by the man who called for the envelope she left. On the other side of the card was a telephone number: Wall 10,000.

Wall 10,000.

Mary knew that. That was the brokerage firm with which Harper Perry was connected.

Aside, at the switchboard, Mary got information. What of FitzRoy 3578? That was Broadway, 1400. The Whitney address was nearest. She would go there first.

As she padded down the hall of the office building on soft-soled shoes, Mary read the name Everett Whitney, Attorney and Counselor at Law, on the door of 1922. There was a light inside. But Whitney would not talk. What use to see him?

Mary hesitated. Just then the elevator clanged. Some one was coming down the hall. Mary darted up the stairs to the next floor, paused, and watched over the rail.

Down the hall she caught sight of a slip of a girl hurrying nervously. Joan Perry! She knew her! She opened Whitney's door.

Mary tiptoed back, listened, strained her ears to catch something through the open transom. It was just a sentence.

"Did you get it yet?"

Mary could not catch the lawyer's answer.

That was strange — Joan Perry here. Now Mary recalled having seen her husband over in the station when she was searching for the crumpled note, and that he had avoided her. Harper Perry's number was on a card in Julia King's handbag, too.

Only a few years before, at school, Mary Mannix had known Joan Perry. Always a striking girl with charming manners, a bit impulsive and headstrong, Joan had ridden along on the crest of the wave of popularity, loved by everybody, spoiled by everybody. At home, at school, in society, she was the victim of her own beauty and charm. And as a young matron she expected persistent homage from a husband who had suffered the adora-

tion received as the birthright of an only child.

Mary waited until she saw Joan slump out of Lawyer Whitney's office. All of Joan's natural gaiety and animation had disappeared. Her little shoulders slouched dejectedly. Under her eyes were deep circles. An excessive pallor on her cheeks betrayed Joan's first capitulation to worry. But nothing could dim the beauty of her appealing soft blue eyes or the brilliance of her sun-spun hair.

Mary started with astonishment when she saw Joan suddenly twist her body tempestuously and stop in the deserted corridor as if she might give way to good old-fashioned tears. Then Mary sauntered down the steps and the hall softly. She was almost up to Joan before the latter heard her and turned suddenly.

"Mary Mannix!" she exclaimed in a half whisper.

"Joan! What is it?"

Joan stiffened a bit.

"Nothing the matter — nothing. Nerves—too much gadding and dancing, I guess. More than I can stand."

"Yes, Joan. But one usually consults a doctor for nerves — not a lawyer!"

Only with a raise of her eyebrows did Joan answer.

"These nerves, Joan—could they have possibly been affected by Julia King's death?"

"Julia King—dead! What do you know about Julia King?" Joan was clutching Mary's arm now in a frenzy of horror and terror.

"Enough to know that you are deeply interested in her and that Mr. Whitney's name will be involved in the case."

"Heavens! What have I let him in for? Did you say she was—dead? How do you know?"

"I happened to be in the Grand Central when it occurred. As a doctor I examined her. It has been found that Mr. Whitney received a sealed envelope from her, the last envelope, by the way, she will ever seal. Naturally, the police will be interested. If you are in it in any way, Joan, let me help you. Circumstantial evidence sometimes is most accusing. What you are holding back now, more unsympathetic people will find out later, and then the newspapers."

Joan shivered at the thought, covered her face hopelessly with her slender white hands.

"Woman's worst enemy, Joan, is herself. Let me help you. You have shown you know something about this Julia King. Tell me what it is—please. I know you too well to think you could possibly do anything criminal. But other folks don't."

Mary was using her keened weapon —fear of the press. Joan suddenly put her arm around Mary and cried:

"Julia King! How I hate her name! I was paying her blackmail, to keep out of scandal—scandal which was utterly false as far as anything wrong I ever did. Foolish—yes; but bad—no! Oh, what a mess I have made of things!"

"Come, Joan, we can't stay here. Someone will surely come." Down the dark end of the corridor Mary led her. "Tell me, so I can help you."

Joan was looking at Mary curiously. "What a vocation for a girl! Why are you playing detective, Mary?"

Mary's eyes glowed softly.

"You all said I was a rolling stone," she said with a smile. "But how else was a girl to get the edges rubbed off so she could fit in the world? Really, all the things I have done have been just so much training for this career of mine!"

AS they reached the end of the dark hall, past the cleaning woman in the offices, Joan said, nervously, on the point of tears:

"You know I was cabaret-mad—

just like Harper and all the rest in our set. About a month ago he took me to task for it, raised the devil one night, told me I ought to settle down, give up all that kind of life—as he had since we were married. I resented it. He used stronger language than I had ever heard him use before. Oh, I was foolish. I told myself I would show him something. I was furious with anger."

Joan scowled down at the floor.

"Mary, why are we impelled to do these things against those we really care for? Is it because their criticism hurts most?" In spite of herself, Joan was dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief. "To myself I reasoned, 'The honeymoon is over. What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose. I'm going out and do something devilish, just to show him. That's the way to hold a man . . . make him realize that other men want you . . . and he'll work harder to hold you. That's what all the newspaper writers say. I'm going to try it. I won't take orders from him.' "

Joan paused a moment, then continued her impulsive confession. "That night I went alone to the Mah Jongg Cabaret. Harper was supposed to be at his club. I met Bill Wright, an old admirer of mine, there. He is a wealthy builder, now, in the Middle West, from St. Louis. He was here on business, with his secretary, Donald Loney. Now that his business was finished up, he was all set for a good time.

"Julia King, one of the cabaret dancers, was with them. When I first joined the party it looked as if Julia were with Bill Wright. But Bill soon straightened that out by claiming me for all the dances. He said Loney was with Julia. For deviltry I stayed along with them, made it a regular party. We tired of the city cabaret. Then we were off in a big hired touring car —it was late—on a trip down to the roadhouses on the Long Island shore; Bill with me, Loney with Julia King.

" 'Way on in the small hours of the morning, coming back—the railroad gates were down—the old car skidded and ran into a tree, smashed. We were all shaken up. I was out. But the thing that worried me most when I came to was how I was going to get out of it if the accident ever got into the papers.

"Then I found out why Bill Wright chummed along with Loney, his secretary. Loney had been his 'striker,' in the service, during the War. Loney wasn't hurt, just shaken up a bit. He started right in to cover things. And he could do it. It was all covered, successfully . . . I thought.

"But two weeks later, like a thunder-bolt, there came a demand from that girl for damages—and her slimy lawyer bounced up to bother me. They threatened to tell Harper the story, give him the names of roadhouses, waiters, and all that, the number of the car, call the chauffeur. And I had actually done no wrong—except my mere being there, in private dining-rooms. But who would believe me in these days?"

Helpless tears were gathering in Joan's eyes. "Mary, that girl knew my position in society. It was blackmail, hush money; she was shaking me down for ten thousand dollars! I knew I was in bad, too. I had been awfully extravagant the last few months and I didn't have ten thousand dollars left of my quarterly allowance. I didn't know what to do, which way to turn. I lay awake all one night trying to think up some way to silence them. It would never do to put this weapon into Harper's hands. I was worried. How was I to scrape up that money without taking someone else into my confidence?

"Bill and Loney had gone back to St. Louis the week before, the day Bill got out of the hospital. Finally,

in desperation, I sent Bill Wright a night letter, asked him to lend the money to me. Instead, he telegraphed ten thousand to me, not exactly a loan, under the circumstances, I suppose, a gift."

"You foolish girl! Then what?"

"I went right to my lawyer, Mr. Whitney, told him the whole thing, asked him to get in touch with the lawyer for Julia King, arrange things, the release, silence, payment of the money any way the girl demanded, anything."

"Didn't he advise you to fight it?"

"Oh, yes. But I was afraid. That was just what I didn't want to have happen!" Wearily Joan brushed her forehead—a little moth drawn pretty close to the flame.

"And this girl, this Julia King—is dead!" she exclaimed, as Mary's presence reminded her. "It will look worse than ever! It will all come out. No one will believe that Bill Wright would send me ten thousand dollars if there wasn't something to it. Oh, Mary—what shall I do?"

"Don't lose your head, Joan. Did Whitney get the papers?"

For a moment Joan hesitated again, raised appealing eyes to Mary helplessly. Yes!" suddenly she exclaimed. "I must go in there and tell him. He doesn't know Julia King is dead. I hate to do it. He told me to fight it, just gave me a talking to, worse than any Harper ever gave me."

"May I go with you?"

"Oh, will you? I wish you would!"

A MOMENT later, in the inner office, Whitney was searching Mary's face shrewdly. He had betrayed no excitement over the murder of Julia King, except that possibly a slight flush had passed over his inscrutable face at the mention of his name being known to have been on the envelope he had called for at five-ten, as arranged by the other lawyer. To Mary there seemed to be a certain callousness in the way he received the news. This dapper little man was extremely self-possessed, calm, and circumspect.

"Who was the lawyer for this Julia King, may I ask?" inquired Mary.

"One of these uptown Broadway lawyers around Forty-Second Street —Herbert Speare, by name."

Toying with the telephone book, Mary found that Herbert Speare's number was the 3578 FitzRoy at the address 1400 Broadway she had learned from Information. Herbert Speare was the man Julia King was calling, had been directed to call, to notify that the papers were signed and the money delivered to her.

"What do you know of him?" she asked.

Whitney shook his head indulgently, a peculiar smile on his face. "I do not belong to what the afternoon picture papers call the Broadway and Forty-second Street Bar Association."

"Who was this chauffeur?" continued Mary?"

"A chap named Berg—Emanuel Berg, I believe," he answered.

"Do you know him?"

"I have seen him. He delivered my papers, the affidavit, the release and the envelope, just as Speare had agreed would be acceptable after I submitted them to him for his approval, before I sent them over to the Message Exchange with the money."

"Who wrote this note?" Mary spread out the crumpled paper she had found on the Grand Central station floor.

"Speare stipulated that it be enclosed," was the suave answer. "Berg brought it back with the other papers."

"I see." Mary still did not seem satisfied. "Mr. Whitney, I don't ask for that affidavit or the release which Julia King signed. Just give me the envelope. Thank you!"

Mary folded the envelope, flap inside, and put it in her bag carefully.

Outside again, with a quick word of reassurance, Mary left the almost haggard Joan and walked quickly over to Broadway.

TALL, slender, furtive was Herbert Speare. Mary felt little respect for the type of attorney represented in the blackmail lawyer for Julia King. His upper lip was short and he was always smiling. But somehow one felt he was likely at any moment to pull that lip all the way back and show a snarling set of fangs.

Then the way he swallowed intrigued her. Every sentence seemed to create such a flood of saliva that he was constantly gulping. In spite of his poise, his clothes, his looks, his assurance, he was to Mary one of the most unprepossessing men she had ever met.

As Mary entered, she noticed on Speare's desk a bankbook of the Day and Night Bank. She seated herself calmly at Speare's invitation.

Before he could ask her her business, she told him:

"Julia King is dead. Did you know it?"

He seemed to take it calmly enough; too calmly, perhaps. His attitude was as if he said: "Well, what business will that bring?" Except for a watery gulp, there was not the least emotion. Finally he did speak.

"What is it to you?" His smile was almost wolfish. "Why come to me?"

"Oh, I merely closed her eyes, as a doctor," retorted Mary casually. "She had just asked for your number over the telephone a moment or two before she died, as requested in your note, to call. That is why I am here. Who is this Julia King?"

"Who is she? She was—according to what you say—*was* a client of mine." Mary had the impression of something equivocal in the answer, quibbling.

"I just happened to stumble into this case," she went on serenely, "and there are some things I would like to know before I make out a report of her death. That's all. What do you know of a man named Berg?" she added without waiting.

Speare shot a covert look of guarded surprise at her. "Taxi stand, up at a cabaret, the Mah Jongg, I understand. Keeps his cars at a garage on the next block."

"Also a client of yours?"

"Yes; in small matters. He consulted me when his father, a photo-engraver, set him up in the business."

"Do you trust him?"

"Trust him? Not for much. Oh, you don't mean for money? Well, he is my errand boy, often. I have always trusted him for that. He carries papers, serves subpœnas, sometimes, drives me when I want a taxi."

"Was he in this—er—Perry case, with Julia King?"

"Miss Mannix, that I couldn't say. How should I know? I was not the father-confessor of Julia King—or Mannie Berg, either." He paused a moment, seeming to resent the cross-questioning. "All I have to say is that Harper Perry is a lucky dog—that's all. I suppose you found out that Julia King was close to Harper Perry—you know so much? He had known her for years!"

Mary wondered why he shot that out. "Why, what had Harper Perry to do with it?" she asked naively.

He leaned over. "I'll tell you a bit of gossip. Do you know, little Miss Fixit, that Berg tells me Julia King had been seen with Harper Perry again? Maybe she was double-crossing Berg—if he was in it with her, as you suppose—playing with this woman's husband. Maybe this Broadway butterfly got in bad—eh? Julia seems to have shaken down his wife;

maybe the husband was to be next. How about it? These pious bankers can pull some raw stuff these days and get away with murder."

Dragging in Harper Perry seemed a bit weak to Mary, at first. Still, she felt that she could use it, play one against the other. "Harper Perry intimate with Julia King," she repeated. Then that explains something I saw."

"How?" queried Speare, with concealed eagerness.

"I saw Harper Perry in the Grand Central just now."

"You did?" He grasped at it quickly and shrewdly, as with an almost malicious delight. "Perhaps he was in on it, then. I've known bankers who needed ten thousand dollars—to say nothing of keeping their names out of little demi-monde scandals!"

Speare seemed to sense that Mary was secretly weighing his innuendoes. He rose, significantly, straightening his desk.

OUTSIDE, and up on Longacre Square, Mary paused at a telephone pay station. She knew Harper Perry's club, and called it, on a chance, since it was dinner-time.

"Mary Mannix speaking, Harper Perry."

"Why, yes, Mary. What can I do for you?"

"Meet me at the Ritz. I want to see you about something very important—for you. I shouldn't have bothered you at the club, otherwise. I'll wait for you there."

It was not long before Harper Perry appeared. He also was a tall, slender, rather distinguished young man. He seemed decidedly nervous and uneasy, but was too much of a gentleman to refuse Mary an interview.

"Shall we go over to a quiet corner?" Mary suggested, endeavoring to banish all trace of nervousness and formality.

Perry acquiesced, led the way, and they settled themselves, he with a curious look of inquiry on his face.

"Harper," she began, "I'm going to get right down to cases. It is getting late."

"Yes? About what?" He was making an effort to appear nonchalant, not to betray anxiety.

"About Julia King. You know she dropped dead in the Grand Central station. Did you know the police have her bag? In the bag was your telephone number. Rather unpleasant, I should say, for you."

He leaned back, stretched his legs for a minute, closed his eyes, then looked at her intently. "Why are you doing this, Mary?" he asked quickly.

"For Joan—and for you, too, Harper." Her voice lowered. "I saw you—and others must have seen you—down at the station, when Julia King was lying dead by the telephone booth. Your telephone number was in her bag, too. It is so easy to piece things together when the police must make someone the goat. The publicity of it all—it will hurt your pride—and your business, too. Customers like their bankers to be persons of moral integrity."

"Yes. . . . Oh, I admit it. I was in the station, at the Lexington Avenue end, to meet Julia King, at quarter after five."

"Why?" persisted Mary.

"Oh, Mary, I say! There are some things a man can't tell!"

"There are some things, Harper Perry, a man had better tell for his own good. Perhaps you would rather tell it at headquarters."

Harper startled. "I'm rather ashamed, Mary, to tell why. Julia King had promised to prove to me something about Joan." He had the good grace to lower his eyes as he finished.

"So you would rather go to Julia

King to find out than to question your spirited little wife."

"Oh, hang it, Mary, Julia was nothing to me. Never had been—er—very much." He hesitated. "Always a little trouble-maker, as far back as I can remember, long before I was married to Joan. She was the horse leach's daughter—if you'll pardon me." He smiled nervously at Mary and seemed desirous to end the interview. It was too uncomfortably personal.

"Just how recently have you seen Julia?" Mary eyed him closely.

"Now, Mary, I haven't seen her." His manner told her he was lying.

"Was it last night, Harper?"

"You are a persistent questioner. I suppose I might as well admit it. Yes! I saw her last night. She told me she would have something on Joan today." He spoke sullenly. A new thought seemed to strike him. "Say, Mary, that lawyer—did Whitney send you to quiz me?"

"Mr. Whitney does not know that I know you, or that I'm here. No one is in my confidence. There is another lawyer in this case who knows you and your habits quite well, though."

"Who?" quickly.

"Did you ever hear of Speare—Herbert Speare?"

Harper leaned forward. "Do you know him, too? What did he tell you about me? It seems you are so darned well informed, there is no need for me to answer anything more." His lip trembled either with anger or nervousness.

"Harper, do you want a divorce from Joan?"

"No—no, of course not. I love Joan."

"Well, you shouldn't pose as such a model of virtue before Joan. When you chase about with little gold-diggers you can expect trouble yourself. You'll get it, too. Heaven only knows how much Julia King has in her apartment about you. You can rest assured any little photograph or letter won't be missed by the police or the reporters."

"Mary—I'll not stand for this. I don't intend to talk to you any more tonight." He stood up nervously to terminate the interview.

"Harper, I hear that Rockwell Gilt Edge Oil has gone down. You're pretty deep in that, are you not? Have you been hit?"

Perry was exasperated. "I refuse to answer!" His face was white with anger. What was this girl implying, anyway? What did not this uncanny person know?

Perry turned on his heel, stalked away, with scarcely a curt nod, still muttering nervously to himself.

HERE was a new tangle to Mary. Harper Perry had known Julia King in his cabaret life. Had Harper Perry figured in this thing, too? Was he ineptly trying to cover himself?

Mary thought. Julia might even have taken him up to the office of Whitney, his wife's lawyer, and showed him the signed paper, if she could get the lawyer to do it. At least she could show him the ten thousand dollars hush money. Or this Speare might have corroborated it. Was there any truth in the nasty innuendoes of Speare?

Mary stopped at one of the private laboratories, left the lipstick and her smutted handkerchief; also the envelope addressed to Everett Whitney. After that she called up an investigator she knew, setting him to work on another question that was in her mind.

Then she decided to wait until the morning, still revolving every aspect of their tangled motives in the case. If this blackmail on Joan worked, why not, indeed, try it on the husband, too? Was that the scheme? These young people were fools with lots of

money. Or had that lawyer, Speare, sought to remove the blackmailer, and at the same time get her ten thousand dollars?

In the morning, with a quiet smile, Mary read the report of her laboratory on the analysis of the lipstick and of the smudges on her handkerchief. There was a separate report on the envelope that bore the name of Everett Whitney.

She had scarcely finished when Joan Perry called up. "And, oh, Mary," she cried breathlessly over the telephone, "they tell me my husband was seen in the Grand Central last night at five-fifteen, as if waiting for someone! What of that? He said he had given up the cabaret life. But he hadn't! He was waiting for her—that woman!"

"Who told you?"

"That lawyer called up again!"

"I see! . . . Get Mr. Whitney. Then ask Perry to meet you at those telephone booths in the station — at eleven. Be there with Mr. Whitney."

Mary called the young doctor at the emergency hospital in the station. The findings of the autopsy were ready.

"Please meet me at that booth, Doctor, at eleven, with a copy of the report?"

"Glad to be there, Miss Mannix."

Mary hurried down to Speare's office. Evidently Speare had been turning the matter over in his legal mind overnight.

"You know," he remarked casually, "the person who reached in and took the ten thousand dollars from that girl did not necessarily murder her."

"N-no." Mary paused a moment. "No. And the person who called for the envelope she sealed and left at the Message Exchange did not necessarily kill her, either!" Speare gulped. "If you don't object, get a car, and have Berg drive us over to the Grand Central right away."

"But why should I go over there?" returned Speare coldly.

"You must go. She was your client, was she not? The doctor will be there with a report. I think it would look odd if I gave it out to the papers that you refused to go with me—under the circumstances!"

Ungraciously, he agreed.

AT the Grand Central Mary nodded to Berg to park his car and carry a little grip she had with her.

Down the steps she ran into Joan and Whitney. It was only a moment for the man at the Message Exchange desk to identify the dapper Whitney as the man who had called for the envelope.

Around at the booths, the telephone operator seemed to half start from her seat as she saw Harper Perry greet them. She seemed about to speak when she caught sight of the slender and tall figure of Speare, and hesitated.

Across from them came the young doctor.

"You have the findings in the autopsy?" inquired Mary.

"Yes, Miss Mannix. The symptoms were of cyanide poisoning—the paralysis of the breathing, everything. On her lips there were traces of cyanide, too; deadly. Just as you suspected. What of the lipstick, Miss Mannix?"

"Just an ordinary lipstick. Nothing. Not a trace of poison there." Quietly Mary produced one of her own laboratory reports. "The flap of that envelope addressed to Everett Whitney had been painted over with cyanide. Nothing new in that. But——"

Mary paused.

"Someone," she went on slowly, "conceived the scheme, put it over, using the King girl, decided on the way it was to be done—done all in less than ten minutes, in the Grand Central, in the suburban home rush. That person painted over the gum of

the addressed, unsealed flap of the envelope with the poison—to get Julia King. That person double-crossed Julia King, to get the whole ten thousand dollars, and get her out of the way. If she were dead, he would have the whole ten thousand, no split. . . ."

Mary swung the door to booth seven open. She flashed a little pocket flashlight into the darkness. There was the scrawl on the wall still. She reached into her own handbag. Slowly she drew out the lipstick, crumpled a bit, worn down on one side.

"What's your first name, Berg?"

She had turned suddenly on the lanky driver still holding her little grip.

"Emanuel."

"Do they ever call you Mannie?"

"Y-yes."

Again Mary flashed her light into the booth. "If you'll study these marks you can just make out the letters—M A N."

Berg snarled a reply. But the doctor had stepped beside him. There were too many people about to make a break for it, too.

"You were the messenger between the lawyers when they were arranging the release, were you not? There was an addressed envelope to Mr. Whitney among the papers. You had access to that, too."

The driver lapsed into a sullen silence.

"An investigator tells me, Berg, that he has your pedigree given to a taxi bonding company, that you have a forfeited bond. Your father, in the photo-engraving business, was on your bond. The photo-engraving business uses cyanide. I think we'll have no trouble showing possession; nor opportunity, nor motive, either."

Mary now took a step closer to Berg.

"Julia King's throat, her breathing, were paralyzed. She had just strength enough to make the dying accusation against you, Mannie. Analysis shows that the particles of pigment that make these letters here were from this, and only this, unusual brand of lipstick, which I picked up with her bag on the floor of the booth!"

Berg, versed in criminal ways, had shut up.

"Sure! I didn't get him—in a cap!" The little telephone girl jumped up from her desk, snatched the cap off Berg. She looked about, lifted a soft hat from Perry's head, clapped it on the chauffeur. "Sure! That's the guy opened the door!"

Mary, next to Perry, hatless, had taken his arm. She was edging over toward Joan.

"And, by the way, Harper," she whispered, "people who live in black pots shouldn't throw stones at black kettles!"

Budlong Castle

By KELLOGG JOHNSON

GOETZ was right.

To the question whether or not there be life after death, the answer is both yes and no. A curious answer, indeed! However, there certainly are states of consciousness between sleep and waking, between the mighty empires of Life and Death, which may properly belong to both.

Take my case, for an instance.

Out of a hundred men that might examine me, I dare say fifty would pronounce me dead, and the other fifty, alive after a fashion. The problem really belongs to philosophy. Let me, however, state my case, which, I am persuaded, will make strange reading.

It was the fourteenth of April, 1923, when I set out with Goetz on the hunting expedition. How much time has elapsed since then I have no idea, and furthermore shall never know.

At first I tried to count the days as they passed. I think I was able to keep count for three months, but then my box was taken downstairs for repairs and I was no longer able to distinguish day from night. And then came the long Arctic winter, and I must have been plunged into darkness for many, many weary months.

St. Joseph's was a riot of color on that memorable day, for the Governor of Alaska was passing through. Flags were waving everywhere—it was indeed quite an event for St. Joseph City! But we had to get under way and missed the spectacle, although as we took the Fox Hill trail we began to hear the strains from a brass band.

The dogs were well rested, and we made very good time; in a very few minutes the little town with its weatherbeaten shacks dropped out of sight behind a hill. Our way led north, up the valley of the Yukon into the rich bear country beyond Anevik.

And now a few words concerning my companion would not be amiss. Goetz, I must confess, was considered eccentric by the majority of the townspeople. When I say that he was eccentric I mean that he would, outside of Alaska, be considered downright crazy.

In fact, I am persuaded that everyone in St. Joseph's City was slightly off. Anyone who has traveled in the North understands what I mean—the long nights and above all the terrific stillness seem to bring out and emphasize all the odd traits in one's being.

GOETZ, however, acted differently from the rest. Whereas the rest had their oddities about them all the time, generally becoming worse as the winter advanced, Goetz's trouble only occasionally cropped out.

For short periods of time he would be very morose and would speak to nobody, and during these fits it is said that he acted very queerly and for no reason at all would burst into violent fits of anger. Most of the time, however, he was very jolly and made a very

agreeable companion. I had never seen Goetz during his tantrums, mind you, and was half of a mind to discredit them.

What he was doing in the Far North nobody knew exactly. He was a very well-educated man, and at one time had been professor of biochemistry at the University of Leipsic. The little scientific training which I had was a bond in common, so you can imagine that I accepted eagerly when he took me aside one morning and proposed the hunting trip.

The dogs were well rested, as I have said, so that in half an hour we had left all traces of civilization behind us. Goetz had been jolly all morning, but I soon began to notice a change come over him.

He began to talk less and less, for the most part to himself, at the same time glowering at the trail with a peculiarly savage look. Then for the first time all the wild tales connected with Goetz and his antics came at once to mind, and I must confess I began to fear for myself.

I first suspected that things were going wrong when he took the turn to the left at Lone Cabin. I knew positively that we were headed in the wrong direction and he was equally certain that we were not, insisting that Anevik lay to the north, which was absurd to anyone who knew the region.

At first I thought it was a whim on his part and merely laughed at him. When I saw he was in earnest, I, too, became serious. The argument became hotter and finally I called him a liar. With a tremendous oath he sprang to his feet, his face horribly distorted by the workings of the passion within him.

This sudden outburst from the bland, generally smiling Goetz naturally filled me with alarm—and then, too, there was something in his eye that made my heart beat a little faster. I said nothing, and Goetz commanded the dogs to mush in the new direction. The impatient dogs sprang into the harness and soon we were tumbling about on one of the craziest trails in the valley of the Yukon.

Three times our sled went over, spilling our gear in every direction over the snow and each time Goetz would merely laugh and help me to pack it on again. This was reassuring—my friend had regained his good humor, a more or less essential thing to two men hunting alone out in the snows of Alaska.

We had traveled in silence for several hours and the sun was low in the skies when we unharnessed the dogs for meat, and prepared ourselves a snack of canned salmon and coffee. Goetz had now become joyful, ebullient. Never had I known him to be so witty, so full of anecdote. This I put down to the genial effects of warm food—fool that I was!

AND now the sun was slanting down to the Behring Sea, dying the snow fields to the west a deep crimson. Although a mist was rising up through the valley, I suggested that we try to reach Three Houses, which I thought could not be more than eight or nine miles away. There we could enjoy the luxury of a warm meal and a bed—the last for many weeks.

My secret intention was to quit my friend once we were within the settlement. His behavior at Lone Cabin had sown the germs of uneasiness in me; I was afraid that another outburst like the last might prove dangerous to me.

At the suggestion he went crazy on the spot, and stamped and swore for over ten minutes. That I was

in the presence of an unpleasant species of lunatic was certain.

The hunting expedition had now lost all the element of fun and it now seemed my duty to humor this man until an opportunity was offered for escape. For an hour or so we plodded along while I thought of various ways of slipping away.

And then I stopped thinking. The blinding glare of the trail and the sharp tooth of the evening's chill had done its work. My mind was a blank—was in that dim borderland between sleep and waking. I was patiently waiting until I could escape.

The scream of a teal startled me to my senses. We had frightened it away from its kill, and there it was directly above our heads, screaming ominously and flapping away to northward. Then for the first time I became aware of a sharp pain in my abdomen—I had been uncomfortable for some time and now the pain was focused with terrific intensity in the pit of the stomach.

I looked behind me; the spectacle that met my eyes for a moment made my heart stop. My silent companion, with eyes bloodshot and every muscle in his blue face set in a way to conjure up devils, was pushing and panting at the sled as if pursued by wild beasts.

"Do you feel sick?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," I said, "and you?"

"Agony for an hour. The salmon, I suppose."

"What's to be done?"

"Get relief."

"But there are no houses around here for fifteen miles," I remonstrated.

"There is one-half a mile away—if only these dogs——"

He never ended the sentence, but slipped and plunged head-first into a snowbank. He lay perfectly still, his legs sprawled over the trail. The spectacle of my tormentor lying at my mercy in the snow was too much. Try as I would, I could not help fingering a revolver. That day I had thought of murder. The thought is as bad as the deed, and my punishment was to be swift and terrible—such as no man can conceive.

After half an hour, during which time I vainly tried to conceive what sort of house would lay in this waste, we turned a sharp bend and came in full view of our destination. Never did sight of human habitation convey such terrific effect. Even the dogs seemed to feel the spell and came to an abrupt stop.

The house itself was an enormous barracks with walls of a cold gray granite and countless narrow windows. The impression created by this structure was military and forbidding and took additional effect from the east wing, which was fallen into decay and presented a fantastic line of ruins.

THEN it suddenly dawned upon me that I was face to face with the notorious Budlong Castle. Budlong Castle indeed! How often had I heard of this half-legendary structure from the native trappers! The structure is in very bad repute among the Eskimos, and none of the superstitious miners in the region will go near it. It was built over a score of years ago by one Major Budlong, who was immediately discharged from the service for his folly. It certainly cost a great deal of time and labor in the building, and strategically is perfectly worthless.

Four or five years after it was completed, the East Wing fell, instantly killing fifteen men who were asleep at the time. Investigation

showed that it was carelessly and unscientifically constructed, and was on the point of falling to the ground. So in course of time it was abandoned, and I dare say it is not visited by white men more than three times a year. As a general rule, ruins come to take on a romantic beauty as time goes on, but not so Budlong Castle, which becomes more hideous each year. People have given different reasons for this. As I pondered its ugliness it came to me that the effect was chiefly owing to the freakish patterns left by weathering, and to the fact that the chromium in the imported Russian glass has given to the windows a deep and sinister shade of violet.

You can imagine my astonishment when told that this was our destination and, moreover, that there was a doctor living in one part of the building—a personal friend of Goetz's—who would soon cure the bad effects of the salmon.

It appeared that the doctor was performing experiments of a peculiar nature and had chosen the structure because of its solitude and, furthermore, for the reason that it would make little difference to anybody were the structure blown to pieces by chemicals. It was useless to argue; a sharp pain doubled me up like a jack-knife, and soon I was being dragged up the stone steps and in through the massive portals. Even then I marveled that Goetz had lost all signs of his discomfort—the poisoned food seemed to have affected me alone.

A young Japanese, neatly dressed and smiling imperturbably, answered to the knock. The master of the house, Dr. ———, was not in, had in fact left that morning for Anevik to receive a new shipment of supplies. It appeared that there was nothing left to do but for Goetz himself to go to the supply room and fetch what was needed. Alas, it was I myself who made the suggestion!

Alone in that great silent hall of stone, into which the Midnight Sun cast a grisly and uncertain light, I still had a few minutes to consider. That I was among madmen or worse seemed certain. Now was the time to flee without fear of discovery.

The howling winds became articulate, like a deep monitory voice urging me away. At the same time some voice within told me that I was in danger, that in a few moments I was to be lost forever. My pain was forgotten now, a panic of fear was upon me; in a moment I was on my feet and struggling to the door.

A voice stopped me just as my hand was on the knob, and turning I saw Goetz with some instruments and drugs under his arm. I still might have escaped, but merely turned and smiled. In the end it was this fatal and inherited weakness which spelled my doom; now I was again the hypocrite, apologizing profusely for my breach of trust and charging my attempted flight to nervousness.

Goetz was quick to forgive and in a minute was pouring a white drug into a tumblerful of water. What the drug may have been, I have no means of telling; I remember that it foamed continuously and had a very bitter and unpleasant taste. Even as I drank it something seemed to die within me.

Now we were all whirling through space at a terrific rate, both Goetz, myself and the Castle. Faster and faster we went until it seemed that my body would be torn to pieces by the velocity. In such giddy and unnatural speeds, ever increasing, it seemed that even the principle of the Soul itself must change.

AND then in the course of time I regained consciousness. Out of the chaos of things whirling before my eyes, a something white and beaproned crystallized into definite form, which soon turned out to be Goetz dressed in a surgeon's gown. By his side stood the Japanese boy similarly dressed. They were speaking, for their lips were moving, and yet I could hear nothing. I tried to move, but seemed to be paralyzed from my toes to the crown of my head.

At first I thought that I was bound, but I could feel no cords. For minutes I tried to squirm this way and that, but could not move an inch.

Curiously, I was not frightened and began deliberately to survey the room I was in. It was not the same room as before, but was considerably smaller. Against the further wall were tiers of shelves, and upon each shelf were boxes set side by side, each one about twenty inches long and a foot wide. The boxes were of a brilliant white except for two small areas placed at the upper corners, about ten inches apart.

The light did not permit me to make them out at the time. The most conspicuous thing in the room, however, was a large stone vat, occupying the centre of the room. At one end of the vat was a white enameled tray, upon which lay some surgical instruments; against the other end, Goetz and his assistant were leaning, and, as I have said, were evidently talking as I judged from the movement of their lips.

From a short distance above a brilliant arc lamp was focused on the instruments and the contents of the vat.

They were now through with their discussion. Goetz set about cleaning his instruments, while the Japanese's movements were much more mysterious. From box to box he went, into each one pouring a red fluid from a can, after which he would take the temperature of the contents of each box with a small thermometer.

To the small gray areas at the corners of the box he paid particular attention, often holding a match before them and regarding them a long time. Goetz now slowly walked over to me. Then he looked at me as he has ever since.

I may add that the smile had completely vanished, nor have I ever seen it reappear. It is difficult to describe the look in his eyes—a nervous, anxious look like that of an inventor surveying his brainwork, or better—for there is at times a certain gleam of malignance—of a dynamiter his machine.

And then there came upon me a sensation more like unto fear than I have ever since experienced. I struggled, tried to shout, strained at my invisible bonds with all my might and main—it was of no use, every nerve in my body save that of the sense of sight seemed to have been cut. Something terrific had happened, the nature of which I could not, nor did not, wish to guess.

BUT the mystery was soon to be solved. The wall lights were now turned on, illuminating the entire room. Goetz together with his companion were at the vat, both tugging with all their strength at some object that lay therein. And now it was out and on the floor before me—a human body disgustingly mutilated. The top of the skull was off, exposing the empty cranium from which the brain had been removed. The hollow eyesockets and split backbone showed where the eyes and part of the spinal column had been dissected out.

My eyes turned from this unpleasant object to the wall with its boxes, which were now in strong relief.

The grayish areas at the upper corners of each box I now recognized as eyes—human eyes—each eye turning slowly this way and that, up and down, and apparently independent of its neighbor.

My startled sight again went back to the body, and then at last the truth began to dawn; the mutilated body had now been turned on its side, and in a second I recognized the chestnut-brown hair, birthmarks and signet ring as my own. I cannot describe my sensations other than that of pity, pity for that noble and comely frame—once the object of vanity, which for so many years had been my faithful companion.

The nutrient solution which is being used to keep my brain alive is probably as perfect as it can be, yet daily I have hopes of being delivered by death. One by one the boxes have been taken away and their contents removed until it must seem that my turn will come.

NOTE: On the twenty-third of January of this year, a man excitedly rushed into my office and reported that he had found the murderer of John Farson. The man before me I recognized as Charles Farson, younger brother of the murdered man. I had almost forgotten the case. On the fourteenth of April, 1923, John Farson, in the company of a Doctor Goetz, left for the Yukon Valley on a hunting trip.

Two days later Goetz returned saying that they had met up with a pack of timber wolves twenty-five miles north of Anevik and that Farson had been torn to pieces.

At the time nothing was thought wrong, as that sort of thing is common enough in these parts. Goetz was well liked in St. Joseph's, where he was an occasional visitor.

Where and how he spent the time when he was not in St. Joseph's, nobody knew or cared. Most people considered that he was pretty well-to-do, and that he spent most of his time trapping and shooting around Budlong Castle where he had been seen quite frequently.

A trapper who blundered into the Castle last March had found to his surprise that Goetz was in possession of one of the wings, which he had fitted up as a hunting lodge.

When this was reported at the village, it seems that young Farson immediately took the cue and started out that same night to find out who really murdered his brother. Encamped on the outskirts of the Castle, he had full opportunity to observe the Doctor's movements. In a day or two things began to happen.

Although the Castle appeared to be untenanted, since nobody answered to his knock, at times vast quantities of a thick brown smoke was seen to issue from the chimney, filling the entire neighborhood with an odor resembling burnt flesh.

At one time Goetz left the Castle and returned within a few days with two Eskimo boys, both apparently under the influence of a narcotic. About four hours after Goetz and his convoy had disappeared behind the doors of the Castle, the same thick brown smoke was seen to pour forth suddenly in great quantities.

Convinced that something was wrong, Farson set out at once for the nearest native village, and there he found that two young men, who answered the description exactly, had disappeared the day before. He likewise found that within the last two years sixteen members of the tribe had met the same fate.

IT was this, then, which brought young Farson to my office. I immediately raised a posse of about sixteen men, mostly recruited from the tradesmen of St. Joseph's, and in a few hours we were before the doors of the Castle. Goetz was just on the point of leaving, evidently to do a bit of hunting, as he had his shooting coat on and a few hundred rounds strapped around his waist.

As he was heading in a direction opposite from ours and could not guess from any snow-tracks that he was being pursued, we thought it was best to let him get away and then catch him when he returned. A few strokes leveled the door, and in a few minutes the terrified Japanese had opened the door leading to the little room where the Doctor had performed his inhuman experiments.

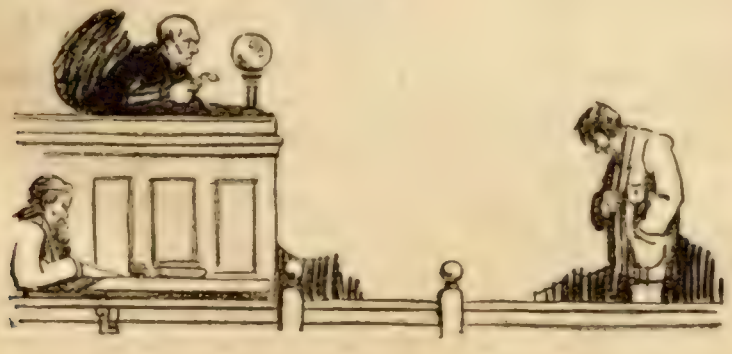
Inside the room we found things exactly as has been described—the shelves with the little white boxes, the stone floor and the large stone vat. A minute's inspection showed us what had been happening.

In each box was a human brain with all the eye nerves attached as well as about two feet of the spinal cord. The eyes and eye muscles had also been carefully removed, and were rigged up in artificial eye-sockets at the front end of the box. The brains and eyes were evidently being kept alive by a red sticky fluid very much resembling blood. We surmised that the operations were performed in the vat filled with this fluid, so that as the parts were dissected out of the body they would continue alive.

Adjoining this chamber of horrors was found a storeroom containing preserved specimens of wolves and dogs as well as a few human bodies. Goetz returned in about three-quarters of an hour, and was immediately shot by one of my men in spite of orders I had given to the contrary.

The narrative which precedes this paper was taken down in Morse code by attacking a moving stylus to the superior oblique muscle of the narrator's eye. At the narrator's request, the red fluid was drained out of his box, and both brain and body were given decent burial in the Anevik Public Cemetery.

JAMES PEARSON,
Deputy Sheriff.



Who Rideth Alone

By PERCIVAL C. WREN

Author of Beau Geste, The Wages of Virtue, Stepsons of France, etc.

A FOUR PART STORY—PART I

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CHAPTER I

"OUT OF THE DEPTHS I RISE"

I WILL start at the very nadir of my fortunes, at their very lowest depths, and you shall see them rise to their zenith, that highest point where they are crowned by failure. You shall see me change from a foolish youth to a man whose god was Duty, and whose great god was challenged, in the supreme hour of the man's career, by the great goddess—Love.

BEHOLD me, then, clad in a dirty canvas stable-suit and wooden clogs, stretched upon a broad, sloping shelf; my head near the wall, resting on a wooden ledge, a foot wide and two inches thick, meant for a pillow, and my feet near the ledge that terminates this beautiful bed, which is some thirty feet long and seven feet wide. It is as long as the room, in fact, and about two feet from the filthy brick floor.

Between my pampered person and the wooden bed, polished by the rubbing of many vile bodies, is nothing. Covering me is a canvas "bread-bag," four feet long and two wide, a sack used for the carrying of army loaves. As a substitute for sheets, blankets and eiderdown quilt, it is inadequate.

The night is bitterly cold, and, beneath my canvas stable-suit, I am wearing my entire wardrobe of under-clothes, in spite of which my teeth are chattering and I shiver from head to foot as though stricken with ague.

I am not allowed to wear my warm regimentals and cloak or overcoat, for, alas, I am in prison.

There is nothing else in the prison but myself, an iron pail and a terrible odor.

I am wrong—and I wish to be strictly accurate and perfectly truthful—there are hungry and insidious insects, number unknown, industrious, ambitious, and successful.

Some of my fellow-troopers pride

themselves on being men of intelligence and reason, and therefore believe only in what they can see. I cannot see the insects, but I, intelligent or not, believe in them firmly.

Hullo, there is something else! A rat has run across my face. I am glad so rude a beast is in prison. Serve him right . . . On the whole, though, I wish he were not in prison, for he is nibbling at my ambrosial locks. If I smite at him wildly I shall administer a severe blow to the brick wall with my knuckles . . .

The door, of six-inch oak, is flung open, and by the light of the lantern in the hand of the sergeant of the guard, I see a man and a brother flung into my retreat. He falls heavily and lies where he falls, in peaceful slumber. He has been worshiping at the shrine of Bacchus, a false god. The door clangs shut and leaves the world to darkness and to me, and the drunken trooper, and the rat, and the insects.

I shiver and wriggle and scratch and wonder whether the appalling stench will conquer, or my proud stomach rise victorious over . . . Yes—something is rising . . .

Again the door opens and a trooper enters, thanking the sergeant of the guard in the politest terms for all his care and kindness. The sergeant of the guard in the impolitest terms bids the trooper remove his canvas trousers.

He does so, and reveals what the sergeant had feared—that he is wearing his uniform trousers beneath them. The sergeant of the guard confiscates the nethermost garments, consigns the prisoner to the nethermost regions, gives him two extra days in this particular region, and goes out.

As the door clangs, the newcomer strikes a match, produces half a candle, lights it, and politely greets me and the happy sleeper on the floor.

"Let us put this one to bed," he suggests, sticking his candle on the pillow-shelf, and I rise, and we lift the bibulous one from the hard floor to the harder but less damp and filthy "bed."

Evidently a humane and kindly soul this! I feel rebuked for my callousness in leaving the drunkard on the ground.

But he does not carry these virtues to excess, for, observing that the Bacchanal has been cast into prison in his walking-out uniform (in which he was evidently brought helpless into barracks), he removes the man's tunic and puts it on over his own canvas stable-jacket.

"The drunk feel nothing," he observes sententiously. "Why should the sober feel cold?"

I no longer feel rebuked.

By the light of his candle I study the stinking black hole in which we lie, its walls decorated by drawings, poems, aphorisms, and *obiter dicta* which do not repay study.

It is a reeking, damp and verminous cellar, some thirty feet square, ventilated only by a single grated aperture, high up in one of the walls, and is an unfit habitation for a horse or dog.

In fact, Colonel du Plessis, our commanding officer, would not have one of the horses here for an hour. But I am here for fifteen days (save when doing punishment-drill) and serve me jolly well right.

For I have *tirée une bordée*—absented myself, without leave, for five days—the longest period that one can be absent without becoming a deserter and getting three years' hard labor as such.

I am not complaining in the very least, mind. I knew the penalty and accepted it. But there was a lady in the case, the very one who had amused us with her remark to De

Lannec, anent a stingy politician of her acquaintance:

"When a man with a Future visits a lady with a Past, he should be thoughtful of the Present, that it be acceptable—and expensive."

She had written to me, beseeching me in the name of old kindnesses to come quickly to Paris, and saying that she knew nothing but death would keep me from helping her in her terrible need. . . .

And Death stayed his hand until I had justified this brave and witty little lady's faith; and now, after the event, sends his fleas, and stinks, and hideous cold too late. . . .

Dear little Veronique!

THERE is a great commotion without, and the candle is instantly extinguished by its owner, who pinches the wick.

Evidently one foolishly and futilely rebels against Fate, and more foolishly and futilely resists the guard.

The door opens and he is flung into the cell with a tremendous crash. The sergeant of the guard makes promises. The prisoner makes sounds and the sounds drown the promises. He must be raging mad, fighting-drunk and full of vile, cheap canteen brandy.

The humane man re-lights his candle, and we see a huge and powerful trooper gibbering in the corner.

What *he* sees is, apparently, a gathering of his deadliest foes, for he draws a long and nasty knife from the back of his trouser-belt and, with a wild yell, makes a rush for us.

The humane man promptly knocks the candle flying and leaps from the bed. I spring like a—well, flea is the most appropriate simile just here and now—in the opposite direction, and take up an attitude of offensive defense, and to anybody who steps in my direction I will give of my best, where I think it will do the most good . . .

Apparently the furious one has missed the humane one and the Bacchanalian one, and has struck with such terrific force as to drive his knife so deeply into the wood that he cannot get it out again.

I am glad that my proud stomach, annoyed as I am with it, was not between the knife and the bed.

And I had always supposed that life in prison was so dull and full of *ennui*.

THE violent one now weeps, the humane one snores, the Bacchanalian one grunts chokingly, and I lie down again, this time without my bread-bag.

Soon the cruel cold, the clammy damp, the wicked flea, the furtive rat, the ghastly stench, and the proud stomach combine with the hard bench and aching bones to make me wish that I were not a sick and dirty man starving in prison.

And a few months ago I was at Eton!

It is all very amusing. . . .

CHAPTER II

UNCLE

DOUBTLESS you wonder how a man may be an Etonian one year and a trooper in a French Hussar Regiment the next.

I am a Frenchman, I am proud to say; but my dear mother, God rest her soul, was an Englishwoman. Hence my being sent to school at Eton.

On my father's death, soon after I had left school, my uncle sent for me.

He is a General, one of the youngest in the French Army, and his wife is the sister of an extremely prominent and powerful politician, at that time, and again since, the Minister of State for War.

My uncle is fanatically patriotic,

and *La France* is his goddess. For her he would love to die, and for her he would see everybody else die—even so agreeable a person as myself. When his last moments come he will be frightfully sick if circumstances are not appropriate for him to say: "I die—that France may live"—a difficult statement to make convincingly if you are sitting in a bath-chair at ninety, and at Vichy or Aix.

He is also a really great soldier and a man of vision. He has a mind that plans broadly, grasps tenaciously, sees clearly.

WELL, he sent for me, and leaving my mother in Devonshire, I hurried to Paris and, without even stopping for *déjeuner*, to his room at the War Office.

Although I had spent all my holidays in France, I had never seen him before, as he had been on foreign service, and I found him to be my *beau ideal* of a French General—tall, spare, hawk-like, a fierce dynamic person.

He eyed me kindly, greeted me coldly, and observed:

"Since your father is spilt milk, as the English say, it is useless to cry over him."

"Now," continued he, after this brief exordium, "you are a Frenchman, the son of a Frenchman. Are you going to renounce your glorious birthright and live in England, or are you going to be worthy of your honored name?"

I replied that I was born a Frenchman, and that I should live and die a Frenchman.

"Good," said my uncle. "In that case you will have to do your military service. Do it at once, and do it as I shall direct."

He paused a brief moment.

"Some day I am going to be the master-builder in consolidating an African empire for France, and I shall need tools that will not turn in my hand; tools on which I can rely absolutely. If you have ambition, if you are a man, obey me and follow me. Help me, and I will make you. Fail me, and I will break you."

I stared and gaped like the imbecile that I sometimes choose to appear.

My uncle rose from his desk and paced the room. Soon I was forgotten, I think, as he gazed upon his splendid vision of the future rather than on his splendid nephew of the present.

"France must expand or die," he continued, and I felt, since it was lunch time, that I was just like France.

"The Sudan," he went on, "could be made a very Argentine of corn and cattle, a very Egypt of cotton! And ah, those Sudanese! What soldiers for France! . . . The Bedouin must be tamed, the Touareg broken, the Senussi won over. . . . *There* is where we want trained emissaries, France's secret ambassadors at work among the tribes. Shall the West come beneath the Tri-color of France, or the Green Banner of Pan-Islamism?"

At the moment I did not greatly care. The schemes of food-supply and irrigation interested me more. Corn and cattle, suitably prepared, and perhaps a little soup, fish and chicken, too.

"Now, boy," concluded my uncle, ceasing his swift pacing and impaling me with a penetrating stare, "I will try you, and I will give you such a chance to become a Marshal of France as falls to few. Listen! Go to the headquarters of the military division of the *arrondissement* in which you were born, show your papers, and enlist as a *Volontaire*. You will then have to serve for only one year instead of the three compulsory for the ordinary conscript, because you are

the son of a widow, have voluntarily enlisted before your time, and can pay the *Volontaire's* fee of 1500 francs. I will see that you are posted to the Blue Hussars, and you will do a year in the ranks. You will never mention my name to a soul, and you will be treated precisely as any other private soldier.

"If you pass out with high marks at the end of the period, come to me, and I will see that you go to Africa with a commission in the Spahis, and your foot will be on the ladder. There, learn Arabic until you know it better than your mother-tongue; and learn to know the Arab better than you know yourself. Then I can use you."

"Oh, yes, Uncle," I dutifully responded as he paused.

"And some day—some day—I swear it—you will be one of France's most valuable and valued servants, leading a life of the deepest interest, highest usefulness, and greatest danger. You will be tried as a cavalryman, tried as a Spahi officer; tried as my aide-de-camp; tried as an emissary, a negotiator, a Secret-Service officer, and will get such a training as shall fit you to succeed me—and *I* shall be Commander-in-Chief and Governor-General of the great African Empire of France!

"But—fail in any way, at any one step or stage of your career, and I have done with you. Be worthy of my trust, and I will make you one of France's greatest servants. . . . But, remember that you must ride alone. *Alone!*"

His fierce and fanatical face relaxed, a sweet smile changed it wholly, and he held out his hand.

"Would you care to lunch with me, my boy?" he said kindly.

"Er—lunch, Uncle?" I replied. "Thank you—yes, I think I could manage a little lunch, perhaps. . . ."

CHAPTER III

THE BLUE HUSSAR

I SETTLED into the rough-and-ready routine of my new life as a Blue Hussar very quickly, and it was not long before I felt it was as though I had known no other.

At times I came near to desperation, but not so near as I should have come had it not been for my private room at a hotel, the fact that I did much of my work with other *Volontaires* in a special class, and the one great certainty, in a world of uncertainties, that there are only twelve months in a year.

It was some time before my days grew monotonous, and shortly after they had begun to do so I contrived to brighten the tedium of life by pretending to kill a man, deliberately, in cold blood and with cold steel. I fear I give the impression of being a bloodthirsty and murderous youth, and I admit that at the time I felt both.

It happened like this.

Dufour, the son of a horse-dealer, and at once my servant, comrade-in-arms and friend, came to me one night as I was undressing for bed, and asked me whether I would care to spend an interesting evening on the morrow.

Upon inquiry, it turned out that he had been approached by a certain Becque, a few days earlier, and invited to spend a jolly evening with him and some other good fellows.

Having accepted the invitation, Dufour found that Becque and the good fellows were a kind of club or society that met in a room above a little wine-shop in the Rue de Salm.

Becque seemed to have plenty of money and plenty of ideas—of an interesting and curious kind. Gradually it dawned upon the intrigued Dufour that Becque was an "agent";

a Man with a Message, a propagandist, and an agitator.

Apparently his object was to "agitate" the Regiment, and his Message was that Law and Order were invented by knaves for the enslavement of fools.

Dufour, I gathered, had played the country bumpkin that he looked; had gathered all the wisdom and wine that he could get, and had replied to Becque's eloquence with no more than profound looks, profounder nods, and profoundest hiccups as the evening progressed. And, through a roseate, vinous glow, the good Becque was seen for the noble friend of poor troopers that he professed to be.

Guided by a proper love of sound political philosophy and sound free wine, Dufour had attended the next meeting of this brave brotherhood, and had so far fallen beneath the spell of Becque's eloquence as to cheer it to the echo, to embrace him warmly and then to collapse, very drunk, upon a bench. After which he listened still more attentively.

After his third visit, he had asked the good Becque if he might formally join his society and bring a friend for whom he could vouch as one who would listen to Becque's sentiments with the deepest interest.

Would I come?

I would. But I feared that if Becque knew I was a *Volontaire*, it would be difficult to persuade him that I was promising anarchistic material. However, I could but try, and if I failed on my own account, I could still take what action I thought fit on the word of Dufour.

On the following evening, having arrayed myself in the uniform that had been issued to me by the *sergent-fourrier* when I joined, I accompanied Dufour to the rendezvous.

Becque I did not know, nor he me, and I received a hearty welcome. Taking stock of the man, I decided that he was an overeducated "intelligent." He had a clever, wicked fanatical face and a most powerful muscular body.

I played the gullible brainless trooper and took note of Becque and his gang. The latter consisted of three classes, I decided; first, the malcontent dregs of the Regiment, men with grievances, real or imaginary, of the kind known as "hard cases" and "King's hard bargains," in England; secondly, men who in private life were violent and dangerous "politicians"; and thirdly, men who would go anywhere, agree with anything, and applaud anybody for a bottle of wine.

Becque's talk interested me.

He was clearly a monomaniac whose whole mental content was *hate;* hate of all who had what he had not; hate of control, discipline and government; hate of whatsoever and whomsoever did not meet with his approval. I put him down as one of those sane lunatics, afflicted with a destruction-complex; a diseased egotist, and a treacherous, dangerous mad dog. Also a very clever man indeed, an eloquent, plausible and very forceful personality.

After a certain amount of noisy good-fellowship in the bar of this low wine-shop, the company adjourned to the room above, the door was locked and the business of the evening began.

It appeared that Dufour had not taken the Oath of Initiation, and it was forthwith administered to him and to me. We were given the choice of immediate departure or swearing upon the Bible, with terrific oaths and solemnities, that we would never divulge the secret of the society nor give any account whatsoever of its proceedings.

The penalty for the infringement of this oath was death.

We took the oath and settled our-

selves to endure an address from Becque on the subject of The Rights of Man—always meaning unwashen, uneducated, unpatriotic and wholly worthless man, *bien entendu.*

As the meeting broke up, I buttonholed the good Becque and, in manner mysterious, earnestly besought him to meet me *alone* outside the Hotel Coq D'Or tomorrow evening, at eight-fifteen. I assured him that great things would result from this meeting, and he promised to come. Whereupon, taking my sword, I dragged my mighty boots and creaking uniform from his foul presence, lest I be tempted to take him by the throat and kill him.

AT eight-fifteen the next evening, I was awaiting Becque outside my hotel, and when he arrived I led him, to his great mystification, to my private room.

"So you are a *Volontaire,* are you?" he began. "Are you a spy, or . . ."

"Or what?" I asked.

He made what I took to be a secret sign.

With my left hand I patted my right elbow, each knee, the top of my head, the back of my neck and the tip of my nose.

He stared, mystified.

So I then rang for a bottle of wine wherewith I might return his hospitality of the previous night—before I dealt with him.

When the waiter retired, I became serious and got down to business promptly.

"Are you a Frenchman?" I asked.

"I am, I suppose," replied Becque. "My mother was of Alsace, my father a Parisian—God curse him!"

"Good," said I. "Have you ever been wrongfully imprisoned, or in any way injured or punished by the State?"

"Me? Prison? No! What d'you mean? Except that we're *all* injured by the State, aren't we? There didn't ought to *be* any State."

"And you hold your tenets of revolution, anarchy, murder, and the overthrow and destruction of the Republic, firmly, and with all your heart and soul, do you?" I asked.

"With all my heart and soul," replied Becque, and added: "Are you from the Third Central? Or—or . . ."

"Never mind," I replied. "Are you prepared to die for your faith?"

"I am," answered Becque.

"You shall," said I, and arose to signify that the conversation was ended.

Opening the door, I motioned the creature to remove itself.

AT that time, you must know, dueling was not merely permitted but, under certain conditions, was compulsory, in the French Army, for officers and troopers alike.

It was considered, rightly or wrongly, that the knowledge that a challenge to a duel would follow insulting conduct must tend to prevent such conduct, and to ensure propriety of behavior among people of the same rank. (Unfortunately no one was allowed to fight a duel with any person of a rank superior to his own. There would otherwise have been a heavy mortality among sergeants.

I do not know whether it may be the result or the cause of this dueling system, but the use of fists is regarded in the French cavalry as vulgar, ruffianly and low. Under no circumstances would two soldiers "come down and settle it behind the riding-school" in the good old Anglo-Saxon way. If they fought at all, they would fight with swords, under supervision, with seconds and surgeons present, and "by order."

A little careful management, and I should have friend Becque where I wanted him, give him the fright of

his life, and perhaps put him out of the "agitating" business for a time.

I told Dufour exactly what I had in mind, and, on the following evening, instead of dining at my hotel, I went in search of the scoundrel.

He was no good to me in the Canteen, on the parade-ground, nor in the street. I needed him where the eye of authority would be quickly turned upon any unseemly *fracas*.

Dufour discovered him doing a scavenging *corvée* in the riding school under the eye of Sergeant Blüm. This would do excellently!

As the fatigue-party was dismissed by the sergeant, Dufour and I strolled by, passing one on either side of Becque, who carried a broom. Lurching slightly, Dufour pushed Becque against me, and I gave him a shove that sent him sprawling.

Springing up, he rushed at me, using the filthy broom as though it had been a bayonet. This I seized with one hand, and with the other smacked the face of friend Becque right heartily. Like any other member of the snake-tribe, Becque spat, and then, being annoyed, I really hit him.

As he went head over heels, Sergeant Blüm rushed forth from the riding-school, attracted by the scuffling and the shouts of the fatigue-party and of Dufour, who had certainly made noise enough for six.

"What's this?" he roared. "Are you street curs, snapping and snarling and scrapping in the gutter—or soldiers of France? Take eight days' *salle de police*, both of you! Who began it and what happened?"

The excellent Dufour gabbled a most untruthful version of the affair, and Sergeant Blüm took notes. Trooper Becque had publicly spat upon *Volontaire* de Beaujolais, who had then knocked him down. . . .

The next evening's orders, read out to the troopers by the *Coporaux-Fourriers*, contained the paragraph, by order of the Colonel:

> The Troopers Becque and de Beaujolais will fight a duel on Monday morning, at ten o'clock, with cavalry-swords, in the riding-school, in the presence of the Major of the Week, the Captain of the Week and of the Second Captains of their respective squadrons, of Surgeon-Major Phillippe and Surgeon-Major Patti-Reville, and of the Fencing-Master, in accordance with Army Regulation 869:—"*If a soldier has been gravely insulted by one of his comrades, and the insult has taken place in public, he must not hesitate to claim reparation for it by a duel. He should address his demand to his Captain Commanding, who should transmit it to the Colonel. But it must not be forgotten that a good soldier ought to avoid quarrels. . . .*"
>
> The successful combatant in this duel will receive fifteen days' imprisonment and the loser will receive thirty days.

On hearing the Order, I was of opinion that the loser would disappear from human ken for more than thirty days.

ON entering the riding-school with Dufour on the Monday morning, I was delighted to see a certain Sergeant Blüm in the place of the fencing-master, who was ill in hospital. Blüm did not like me, and I did not like him. So it pleased me to find that my task was rendered easier and that Sergeant Blüm was, at the same time, placed in an unpleasant and risky situation. For it was the fencing-master's job, while acting as master of ceremonies and referee, to stand close by, with a steel scabbard in his hand, and prevent either of the combatants from killing, or even dangerously wounding, the other!

Severe punishment would follow his failing to do his duty in this respect, and the noisy, swaggering Blüm was no *maitre d'armes*.

As instructed, we were "in stable-

kit, with any foot-wear preferred," so I had tucked my canvas trousers into socks and put on a pair of gymnasium shoes.

Scrutinizing Becque carefully, I came to the conclusion that he would show the courage of a cornered rat, and that if he had paid as much attention to fencing as to physical-culture and anarchistic sedition, he would put up a pretty useful fight. I wondered what sort of a swordsman he was, and whether he was in the habit, like a good many troopers, of voluntarily supplementing the compulsory attendance at fencing-school for instruction in "foils and sabers."

When all the officers and official spectators were present, we were ordered to strip to the waist, were given swords and put face to face by Sergeant Blüm, who vehemently impressed upon us the imperative duty of instantly stopping when he cried halt.

Blüm then gave the order "on guard," and stood with his steel scabbard beneath our crossed swords. Throughout the fight he held this ready to parry any head-cuts or to strike down a dangerous thrust. (And they called this a duel!)

My great fear was, that with the clumsy lout sticking his scabbard into the fight and deflecting cuts and thrusts, I should scratch Becque or Becque would scratch me. This would end the preposterous fight at once, as these glorious affairs were "first-blood" duels, and my object was to incapacitate Becque and both frighten and punish a viperous and treacherous enemy of my country.

I stared hard into Becque's shifty eyes, Blüm shouted "Go!" and Becque rushed at me, slashing like a madman, with what I took to be the courage and ferocity of a savage temper. I parried for dear life, and allowed him to tire his arm and exhaust his lungs. Blüm worried me nearly as much as Becque, for he leaped around, yelling to us to be careful and swiping at both our swords. He made me laugh, and that made me angry (and him furious), for it was no laughing matter.

"Halt!" he cried, and I sprang back, Becque aiming another cut at my head, after the order had been given.

"You, Becque," he shouted, *"be more careful,* will you? D'you think you are beating carpets, or fighting a duel, you . . ."

Becque was pale, and puffing like a porpoise. He had not attempted a single thrust or feint, but had merely slashed with tremendous speed and force. He was a strong plain swordsman, but not a really good and pretty fencer.

Provided neither of us scratched the other's arm nor drew blood prematurely, I could put Becque where I wanted him—unless the fool Blüm foiled me. It was like fighting two men at once.

"On guard!" cried Blüm. "Go!"

Becque instantly cut, with a *coup de flanc* and, as I parried, struck at my head. He was fighting even more quickly than in the first round, but with less violence and ferocity. He was tiring, and my chance was coming. I could have touched him a dozen times, but that was not my object. I was sorely tempted, a moment later, when he missed my head, and the heavy sword carried his hand out of guard, but the wretched Blüm's scabbard was between us in a second.

Becque was breathing heavily, and it was my turn to attack.

Now!

Suddenly Becque sprang backward and thrust the point of his sword into the ground. Quite unnecessarily, Blüm struck my sword down and stepped between us.

"What's the matter, you?" snapped Major de Montreson.

"I am satisfied," panted Becque. This was a trick to get a much needed breathing space.

"Well, I'm not," replied the major sourly. "Are you?" he asked, pointing at me.

"It is a duel *au premier sang*, Monsieur le Majeur," I replied, "and there is no blood yet."

"Quite so," agreed the major. "The duel will continue at once. And if you, Becque, retreat again like that, you shall fight with your back to a corner."

"On guard!" cried Sergeant Blüm, and we crossed swords. "Go!"

Becque made a hurricane attack. I parried until I judged that his arm was again tired, and then feinted at his head. Up went his sword and Blüm's scabbard, and my feint became a thrust beneath the pair of them—and through Becque's right breast.

France had one efficient enemy the less for quite a good while.

"I'll do that for you again when you come out of hospital, friend Becque," said I, as he staggered back.

THERE was a most tremendous row, ending in a *conseil de discipline*, with myself in the dock, Becque being in the infirmary. As all was in order, however, and nothing had been irregular (except that the duelists had really fought), I was not sent, as my comrades had cheerfully prophesied, to three years hard labor in the *Compagnies de discipline* in Algeria. I was merely given fifteen days prison, to teach me not to fight when dueling, another time; and, joy of joys, Sergeant Blüm was given reduction in rank.

I walked most warily in the presence of Corporal Blüm, until, as the result of my being second in the April examination for *volontaires*, I became a corporal myself.

After that promotion, life became a little less complex, and improved still further when, after the results of the October examination was made known, I became a sergeant.

AFTER hanging between life and death for several weeks, Becque began to mend, and Surgeon-Major Patti-Reville pronounced him to be out of danger.

That same day I received an order through Sergeant de Poncey to visit the junior officer of our squadron, *Sous-Lieutenant* Raoul d'Auray de Redon, in his quarters, after "stables."

"And what the devil does *that* mean, Sergeant?" I asked.

"I know no more than you," was the reply, "but I do know that Sub-Lieutenant d'Auray de Redon is one of the very finest gentlemen God ever made. He has saved me from suicide, simply by a kind word and his splendid smile. . . . If only our officers were all like him!"

I, too, had noticed this young gentleman and had been struck by his beauty. I do not mean prettiness nor handsomeness, but *beauty*. It shone from within him, and illuminated a perfectly formed face. A light of truth, strength, courage and gentleness burned like a flame within the glorious lamp of his body. He radiated friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, and was yet the best disciplinarian in the regiment—because he had no need to "keep" discipline. It kept itself, where he was concerned. And with all his gentle goodness of heart, he was a strong man. Nay, he was a lion of strength and courage. He had the noble *élan* of the French and the cool forceful determination and bulldog tenacity of the Anglo-Saxon.

After a wash and some valeting by

Dufour, I made my way to Sub-Lieutenant d'Auray de Redon's quarters.

He was seated at a table, and looked up with a long appraising stare as I saluted and stood at attention.

"You sent for me, *mon Lieutenant,*" I murmured.

"I did," replied de Redon and the brilliant brown eyes smiled, although the strong handsome face did not.

"Why did you want to fight Becque?" he suddenly shot at me.

I was somewhat taken aback.

"Er—he, ah—he has dirty fingernails, *mon Lieutenant,*" I replied.

"Quite probably," observed de Redon. "Quite. And are you going to start a Clean Finger-Nail Brigade in the Blue Hussars, and fight all those who do not join it and live up to its excellent tenets?"

"No, *mon Lieutenant,*" I admitted.

"Then why Becque in particular, out of a few hundred?" continued de Redon.

"Oh—he eats garlic—and sometimes has a cast in his eye—and he jerks at his horse's mouth—and wipes his nose with the back of his hand, and shows a dog-tooth when he grins, *mon Lieutenant,*" I replied.

"Ah—you supply one with interesting information," observed my officer dryly. "Now I will supply you with some, though it won't be so interesting, because you already know it. . . . In addition to his garlic, cast, jerks, long dog-tooth and nose-wiping, he is a seditious scoundrel, a hireling and an agitator, and is trying to seduce and corrupt foolish troopers. You have attended his meetings, taken the oath of secrecy and fidelity to his Society, and you have been closeted with him in private at your hotel."

I stared at de Redon in astonishment, and said what is frequently an excellent thing to say—nothing.

"Now," continued the interlocutor, "perhaps you will answer my question a little more fully. . . . Why did you challenge Becque, after you had joined his little Society for the destruction of the State and the ruin of France?"

"Because of the things I have already mentioned, *mon officier,* and because I thought he would be the better for a rest," I replied. "I considered it a good way to end his activities. My idea was to threaten him with a duel for every meeting that he held."

"Ah—you did, eh?" smiled de Redon. "And now I want you to tell me just what happened at these meetings, just what was said, and the names of the troopers who were present."

"I cannot do that, sir," I replied. "As you seem to be aware, I took a solemn oath to reveal nothing whatsoever."

Sub-Lieutenant Raoul d'Auray de Redon rose from his chair and came round to where I was standing. Was he—a gentleman—going to demand with threats and menaces that I break my word, even to such a rat as Becque?

"Stand at ease, Sergeant Henri de Beaujolais," he said, "and shake hands with a brother of the Service! . . . Oh, yes, I know all about you, old chap. . . . From de Lannec, though I don't know whether your uncle is aware of the fact."

I took the proffered hand and stammered my thanks at this honor from my superior officer.

"Oh, nonsense. You'll be *my* superior officer, some day. . . . I must say I admire your pluck in coming to us, by way of the ranks. . . . How soon will you come to Africa? I am off next month. . . . Spahis. . . . Until I am perfect in languages and disguises. . . . Isn't it a glorious honor to be one of your uncle's picked men? . . . And now about this Becque. You needn't pursue him any more. I have been giving myself a little Secret

Service practice and experiment. . . . Much easier here in France than it will be in Africa, by Jove! . . . Well, we know all about Becque and when he leaves the hospital he will go where there will be nothing to distract his great mind from his great thoughts for two or three years. He may be a mad dog, but I fancy that the mad dog has some pretty sane owners and employers."

"Some one has denounced him, then?" I said.

"No, my dear de Beaujolais, not yet. But some one is going to do so. Some one who attended his last meeting—and who was too drunk to take any oaths. . . . So drunk that he could only giggle helplessly when invited to swear!"

"*You?*" I asked.

"Me," replied Sub-Lieutenant d'Auray de Redon.

SUCH was my first encounter with this brilliant and splendid man, whom I came to love as a brother is rarely loved. I will tell in due course of my last encounter with him.

CHAPTER IV

AFRICA

AT THE end of the year, my uncle was pleased grimly to express himself as satisfied, and to send me forthwith to the Military School of Saumur, where selected cavalry sergeants of good family and superior education are made into officers.

Here nothing amusing occurred, and I was glad when, once more, wires were pulled and I was instructed to betake myself and my new commission to Algeria and present myself at the *Quartier des Spahis* at Sidi-bel-Abbès.

I shall never forget my first glimpse of my new home. It is indelibly etched upon the tablets of my memory.

I stood at the great gates in the lane that separates the Spahis' barracks from those of the Foreign Legion, and thought of the day—so recently passed—when I had stood, a wretched civilian, at those of the Blue Hussars in St. Denis.

Outside the red-white-and-blue striped sentry-box stood a bearded, dusky giant, a huge red turban crowning the snowy linen *kafiya* that framed his face; a scarlet bemedaled Zouave jacket covering a gaudy waistcoat and tremendous red sash, and the most voluminous skirt-like white baggy trousers almost concealing his great spurred cavalry-boots. A huge curved cavalry-saber hung at his left side, and in his right hand he bore a carbine.

"And so this is the type of warrior I am to lead in cavalry-charges!" thought I, and wondered if there were any to equal it in the world.

He saluted me with faultless smartness and precision, and little guessed how I was thrilled to the marrow of my bones as I returned the first salute I had received from a man of my own regiment.

Standing at the big open window of the *Salle de Rapport* in the regimental-offices near the gate was about the smartest masculine figure I had ever beheld—that of an officer in a gold-frogged white tunic (that must surely have covered a pair of corsets) which fitted his wide shoulders and narrow waist as paper fits the walls of a room.

Beneath a high red tarbush smiled one of the handsomest faces I have ever seen. So charming was the smile, so really beautiful the whole man, that it could be none other than Raoul d'Auray de Redon, here a couple of years before me.

I know now that one man can really love another with the love that is

described as existing between David and Jonathan. To this day I can never look upon the portrait of Raoul d'Auray de Redon, of whom more anon, without a pang of bitter-sweet pain and a half-conscious prayer. . . .

By the guard-room stood a group that I can see now—a statuesque *sous-officier* in spotless white drill tunic and trousers, white shoes and a fez—l'Adjudant Lescault; an elderly French sergeant-major in scarlet patrol-jacket, white riding-breeches with a double black stripe down the sides, and a red *képi* with a gold band; an Arab sergeant dressed like the sentry, save for his chevrons; and the guard, who seemed to me to be a mixture of Arabs and Frenchmen, for some of them were as fair in complexion as myself.

Beyond this group stood a lieutenant, examining a horse held by an Arab groom, and I was constrained to stare at this gentleman, for beneath a red tunic he wore a pair of the colossal Spahi white skirt-trousers, and these were gathered in at the ankle to reveal a pair of tiny pointed-toed patent shoes! His other extremity was adorned by a rakish peaked *képi* in scarlet and gold.

My future brothers-in-arms these!

I glanced beyond them to the oriental garden, tree-embowered, which lay between the gates and the distant low colonnaded stables, and, feeling that I could embrace all men, I stepped forward and entered upon my heritage.

NEVERTHELESS, it was not very long before life at the depôt in Sidi-bel-Abbès grew very boring indeed. One quickly grew tired of the mild dissipations of our club, the *Cercle Militaire*, and of the more sordid ones of the alleged haunts of pleasure boasted by that dull provincial garrison-town.

Work saved me from weariness, however, for I worked like a blinded well-camel, at Arabic, in addition to the ordinary duties of a cavalry-officer.

To the Spahis came Dufour, sent by my uncle at my request, and together we pursued our studies in the language and in disguises. Nor was I sorry when, at the earliest possible moment, my uncle again pulled wires, and I was ordered to Morocco.

In that fascinating country I was extremely lucky; and after the heavy fighting round, and in, Fez, I was a captain, and had two pretty little pieces of metal and ribbon to hang on my tunic. And in the nasty little business with the Zarhoun tribe (who took it upon them to close the roads between Fez and Tangier and between Meknes and Rabat) I was given command of the squadron that formed part of the composite battalion entrusted with the job.

With this squadron was my good Dufour, of course, a non-commissioned officer already wearing the *médaille militaire* for valor.

Of its winning I must briefly tell the tale, because the memory of it was so cruelly and poignantly before my mind in the awful hour when I had to leave him . . . leave him . . . ugh!

On that black day I saw again, clear and in glowing colors, this picture:

I am charging a great *harka* of very brave and fanatical Moors, at the head of my squadron. We do not charge in line as the English do, but every man for himself, hell-for-leather, at the most tremendous pace to which he can spur his horse.

Being the best mounted, I am naturally well ahead. The earth seems to tremble beneath the thundering onrush of the finest squadron in the world. As we are about to close with the enemy, I lower my point and straighten my arm. (Always use the point until you are brought to a

standstill, and then use the edge, with the speed and force of lightning.)

The Moors are as cunning as they are brave. Hundreds of infantrymen drop behind rocks and big stones and into nullahs, level their long guns and European rifles, and blaze into the brown of us. Hundreds of mounted men swerve off to right and left to take us in flank and surround us, when the shock of our impact upon the main body has broken our charge and brought us to a halt.

They do not know that we shall go through them like a knife through cheese, re-form and charge back again; and even if we do not scatter them like chaff, we will effectually prevent their charging and capturing our silent and almost defenseless little mountain-guns.

We thunder on, an irresistible avalanche of men and horses, and, like a swimmer diving from a cliff into the sea, I am into them with a mighty crash. . . . A big Moor and his Barbary stallion go head over heels as my good horse and I strike them amidships, like a single projectile, and, but for the sword-knot whose cord is round my wrist, I should have lost my sword, pulled from my hand as I withdrew it from beneath the Moor's right arm.

I spur my horse; he bounds over the prostrate horse and man; I give another big Moslem my point, right in the middle of his long black beard, as I charge past him, and then run full tilt into a solid mass of men and horses. I cut and parry; slash, parry and cut; thrust and strike, and rise in my stirrups and hack and hew—until I am through and spurring again to a gallop. . . .

And then I know that my horse is hit, and going down, and I am flying over his head and that the earth rises up and smashes my face and strikes my chest so cruel a blow that the breath is driven from my body and I am a living pain.

Oh, the agony of that struggle for breath, after the smashing crash that has broken half my ribs, and my right arm, and my jawbone! And oh, the torture of my dead horse's weight on my broken leg and ankle!

And why was my throat not being cut? Why no spears being driven through my back? Why was my skull not being battered in?

I got my dripping face from out of the dust, wiped it with my left sleeve, and got onto my left elbow.

I was the centre of a terrific "dog-fight," and, standing across me, leaping over me, whirling round and round, jumping from side to side like a fiend and a madman, a grand athlete and a great hero—was Dufour.

Sick and shattered as I was, I could still admire his wonderful swordsmanship and marvel at his extraordinary agility, strength and skill.

Soon I realized that I could do more than admire. I could help, although pinned to the ground by my horse and feeling sick, shattered and smashed.

With infinite pain I dragged my revolver from its holster, and rejoiced that I had made myself as good a shot with my left hand as with my right.

Then lying on my right side, and sighting as well and quickly as I could left-handed and in so awkward a position, I fired at a man whose spear was driving at Dufour's back, at another whose great sword was swung up to cleave him, at a third whose long gun was presented at him, and then, after a wave of death-like faintness had passed, into the very face of one who had sprung past him and was in the act of driving his big curved dagger into my breast.

As I aimed my last shot at the man whose sword was clashing on Dufour's saber, the squadron came

thundering back, headed by Lieutenant D'Auray de Redon, and never was I more glad to see the face of my beloved Raoul.

He and several of the Spahis drew rein, scattered our assailants and pursued them, while Dufour caught a riderless troop-horse and, I am told, dragged me clear and lifted me across the saddle, jumped onto its back behind the saddle, and galloped back to our position.

It seems that he had been behind me when my horse came down, had deliberately reined up, dismounted and run to rescue me when he was attacked. Nor had he striven to cut his way out from among the few who were surrounding him, but had stood his ground, defending me until he was the centre of the mob of wild fanatics from which Raoul's charge saved us in the nick of time. He was bleeding from half a dozen sword-cuts by the time he got me away.

Yes, this was the picture that burned before my eyes on the dreadful day of which I shall tell you.

Duty is a stern and jealous god.

I MADE a quick recovery and thanked Heaven and our splendid surgeons when I found that I was not, as I had feared, to be lame for life.

I got back to work, and when my uncle, punctual to his life's program, came out to Africa, I was able to join his staff as an officer who knew more than a little about the country and its fascinating towns and people; an officer who could speak Arabic and its Moorish variant like a native, and who could wander through suq and street and bazaar as a beggar, a pedlar, a swaggering Riffian *askri* of the *bled*, a nervous cringing Jew of the *mellah*, a fanatic of Muhai Idris, a camel-man, or a donkey-driver, without the least fear of discovery.

And I believe I could tell him things that no other officer in all Morocco could tell him, of subterranean tribal politics, gutter intrigues of the fanatical mobs of towns that mattered—such as Meknes, for example, where I relieved my friend Captain de Lannec, and was soon playing the Jew-pedlar, and sending out messengers up to the day of its rising and the great massacre. Also of the respective attitudes, at different times, of various parts of the country and various classes of the people toward the Sultan Abd-el-Aziz; the would-be Sultan, Mulai Hafid; the Pretender, Mulai Zine, his brother; or the great powerful marabout, Ibn Nualla.

My uncle was pleased with the tool of his fashioning, and my name was writ large in the books of the *Bureau des Affaires Indigènes at Rabat.*

Nor do I think that there was any jealously or grumbling when I became the youngest major in the French Army and disappeared from human ken to watch affairs in Zaguig in the disguise of a native of that mean city.

I entered it on foot, in the guise of a hill-man from the north, and as I passed through the tunnel of the great gate in the mighty ramparts, a camel-driver rose from where he squatted beside his beast and accosted me.

We gave what I think was an unexceptionable rendering of the meeting of two Arab friends who had not seen each other for a long time.

"Let me be the proud means of giving your honored legs a rest, my brother," said the man loudly, as he again embraced me and patted my back with both hands. "Let my camel bear you to the lodging you honor with your shining presence . . . God make you strong . . . God give you many sons . . . God send rain upon your barley crop. . . ."

And he led me to where his kneeling camel snarled.

May I be believed when I say that it was not until he had patted my back (three right hand, two left, one right, one left) that I knew that this dirty bearded shaggy camel-man was Raoul d'Auray de Redon whom I was to relieve here, that he might make a long journey with a caravan of a certain Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf, a Europeanized Arab merchant whom our Secret Service trusted—to a certain extent.

Raoul it was, however, and, at Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf's house, he told me all he could of local politics, intrigues, undercurrents and native affairs in general.

"It's high time we made a plain gesture and took a firm forward step," he concluded. "It is known, of course, that we are coming and that the Military Mission will be a strong one—and it is anticipated that it will be followed by a column. Well, the brutes have asked for it, and they'll get it—but I think it is a case of the sooner the quicker.

"I'll tell you a curious thing, my friend. I have been attending some very interesting gatherings, and at one or two of them was a heavily-bearded fanatic who harangued the audience volubly and eloquently—but methought his Arabic had an accent. So I got Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf to let me take his trusted old factotum, Ali Mansur, with me to a little fruit-party which the eloquent one was giving.

"When old Ali Mansur had gobbled all the fruit he could hold, and we sat replete, listening to our host's harangue upon the greatness of Islam and the littleness and nastiness of Unbelievers—especially the Franzawi Unbelievers who have conquered Algeria and penetrated Tunisia and Morocco and intend to come to Zaguig—I asked old Ali if he thought the man spoke curious Arabic and was a foreigner himself.

"He is an Egyptian or a Moor or a Turk or something else, doubtless," grunted Ali. "But he is a true son of Islam and a father of the poor and the oppressed. *Wallahi*, but those melons and figs and dates were good—Allah reward him!"

"So I decided that I was right, and that this fellow's Arabic *was* a little queer. Well, I followed him about and, one evening, saw him meet another man, evidently by appointment, in the Zaouia Gardens. And the other man made a much quicker job of tucking his legs up under him on the stone seat and squatting cross-legged like a true native than my suspect did.

"He was a little slow and clumsy about it, and I fancied that he would have sat on the seat in European fashion if he had been alone and unobserved. Whereupon I became a wicked cut-purse robber of a mountaineer, crept up behind those two in barefooted silence, and suddenly fetched our eloquent friend a very sharp crack on the head with my heavy *matrack* stick.

"He let out one word and sprang to his feet. . . . The hood of my dirty *burnous* was well over my ingenuous countenance and the evening was growing dark, but I got a clear glimpse of his face and then fled for my life. I am a good runner, as you know, and I had learned what I wanted—or most of it."

I waited, deeply interested, while Raoul paused and smiled at me.

"When a man has an exclamation fairly *knocked* out of him, so to speak, that exclamation will be in his mother-tongue," continued Raoul. "And if a man has, at times, a very slight cast in his eye, that cast is much enhanced and emphasized in a moment of sudden shock, fright, anger or other violent emotion.

"True," I agreed.

"My friend," said Raoul, "that man's exclamation, when I hit him, was '*Himmel!*' and as he turned round there was a most pronounced cast in his left eye. He almost squinted, in fact . . ."

"The former point is highly interesting," I observed; "what of the latter?"

"Henri," replied Raoul, "do you remember a man who—let me see—had dirty finger-nails, ate garlic, jerked his horse's mouth, wiped his nose with the back of his hand, showed a dog-tooth when he grinned, and had a cast in his eye? . . . A man in the Blue Hussars, a dozen years and more ago? Eh, do you?"

"*Becque!*" I exclaimed.

"Becque, I verily believe," said Raoul.

"But wouldn't he exclaim in French, under such sudden and violent shock?" I demurred.

"Not if he had been bred and born speaking the German of a German mother in Alsace," replied my friend. "German would be literally his mother-tongue. He would learn from his French father to speak perfect French, and I know that his parents were of the two nationalities."

"It *may* be Becque, of course," I said doubtfully.

"I believe it is he," replied Raoul, "and I also believe you're the man to make certain. . . . What about continuing that little duel—with no Sergeant Blüm to interrupt, eh?"

"If it is he, and I can manage it, the duel will be taken up at the point where it was stopped owing to circumstances beyond Monsieur Becque's control," I remarked.

"Yes, I think *ce bon* Becque ought to die," smiled Raoul, "as a traitor, a renegade and a spy. For those things he is, as the French born son of a Frenchman, and as a soldier who has worn the uniform of France and taken the oath of true and faithful service to the Republic."

"Where was he born?" I asked.

"Paris," replied Raoul. "Born and bred in Paris. He was known to the police as an anarchist-apache when quite a lad. . . . It is doubtful whether all his aliases have been exposed yet and all his days accounted for."

And we talked on far into the night, in Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf's great moon-lit gardens.

Next day Raoul departed on his journey of terrible hardships — a camel-man in the employ of Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf, to Lake Tchad and Timbuktu, with his life in his hands and all his notes and observations to be kept in his head.

OF the man who might or might not be Becque I saw nothing whatever in Zaguig. He may have taken fright at Raoul's sudden and inexplicable assault upon him, and thought that his secret was discovered; or he may have departed by reason of the approach of the French forces. On the other hand, he may merely have gone away to report upon the situation in Zaguig; or, again, he may have been in the place the whole time.

In any event, I got no news nor trace of him, and soon dismissed him from my mind. And in due course I was relieved, in turn, by Captain de Lannec, returned to Morocco, and was sent thence into the far south, ostensibly to organize Mounted-Infantry companies out of mules and the Foreign Legion, but really to do a little finding-out and a little intelligence-organizing in the direction of the territories of our various southern neighbors and to travel from Senegal to Wadai, with peeps into Nigeria and the Cameroons. Here I had some very instructive experiences and a very weird one at a place called Zinderneuf, whence I went on leave *via* Nigeria, traveling with a most excellent Briton

named George Lawrence, who had been my very senior and revered fag-master at Eton!

It is a queer little world, and very amusing.

And everywhere I went, the good Dufour, brave, staunch, and an extraordinarily good mimic of any kind of native, went also, "seconded for special service in the Intelligence Department." And invaluable work it was.

At disguise and dialect he was as good, if not better, as myself; and it delighted me to get him still further decorated and promoted as he deserved.

And so Fate, my uncle and my own hard, dangerous and exciting work brought me to the great adventure of my life, to the failure that rewarded my labors and crowned my career, and simultaneously to what is the greatest adventure of any man's life —*love*.

True love, the paramount thing, the only thing that really matters. . . . Love—without which all failure and success are Dead Sea fruit, and dust and ashes in the mouth.

LITTLE did I dream what awaited me when I got the laconic message from my uncle, now Commander-in-Chief and Governor-General:

> Return forthwith to Zaguig and wait instructions.

Zaguig, as I knew to my sorrow, was a "holy" city, and, like most holy cities, was tenanted by some of the unholiest scum of mankind that pollute the earth.

CHAPTER V

ZAGUIG

AFTER the cities of Morocco the Enchantress, I hated going back to Zaguig, the last-won and least-subdued of our Saharan outposts of civilization. And after the bold Moor I hated the secretive, furtive, evil Zaguigans, who reminded me of the fat, fair and false Fezai.

Not that Zaguig could compare with Fez or Marrakesh, of course, that bright jewel sunk in its green ocean of palms, with its wonderful gardens, Moorish architecture, cool marble, bright tiles, fountains, and charming hidden *patios*.

This Zaguig, now occupied by French troops, was an ash-heap populated with vermin, and very dangerous vermin, too.

I did not like the position of affairs at all.

I did not like the careless overconfident attitude of Colonel Levasseur; I did not like the extremely scattered disposition of the small garrison, a mere advance guard, and I did not like the fact that Miss Mary Hankinson Vanbrugh was, with her brother, the guest of the said Colonel Levasseur.

You see, I *knew* what was going on beneath the surface, and what I did not know from personal observation, Dufour could tell me.

When I was not Major de Beaujolais, I was a water-carrier; and when Dufour was not *Adjudant* Dufour of the Spahis, he was a seller of dates and melons in the suq. When I was here before, I had been a blind leper, when not a coolie in the garden of Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf, the friend of France.

Nor could I do more than lay my information before Colonel Levasseur. He was commanding officer of the troops and Governor of the town, and I was merely a detached officer of the Intelligence Department, sent to Zaguig to make arrangements for pushing off "into the blue"—on *very* Secret Service—as soon as word came that the moment was ripe.

Extracts from a letter, written by my uncle at Algiers, and which I

found awaiting me at Zaguig, will tell you as much as I knew myself:

. . . and so, my dear Henri, comes your chance—the work for which the tool has been fashioned. Succeed and you will have struck a mighty blow for France. But mind—you will have to be as swift and as silent as you will have to be clever, and you must stand or fall absolutely alone. If they filet you and boil you in oil—you will have to boil unavenged. A desert-column operating in *that* direction would rouse such a howl in the German press (and in one or two others) as would do infinite harm at home and would hamper and hinder my work out here for years. The Government is none too firmly seated, and has powerful enemies, and you must not provide the stick wherewith to beat the dog.

On the other hand, I am expecting, and only waiting for, the dispatch which will sanction a subsidy of a million francs, so long as this Federation remains in alliance with France and rejects all overtures to Pan-Islamism. . . . That is the fear and the danger, the one great menace to our young and growing African Empire. . . . God grant that you are successful and that you are before Wassmuss or Bartels or any Senussi emissaries.

What makes me anxious, is the possibility of this new and remarkable Emir el Hamel el Kebir announcing himself to be that very *Mahdi* whom the Bedouin tribes of that part are always expecting—a sort of Messiah.

As you know, the Senussi Sidi el Mahdi, the holiest prophet since Mahomet, is supposed to be still alive. He disappeared at Garu on the way to Wadai, and an empty coffin was buried with tremendous pomp and religious fervor at holy Kufara. He reappears from time to time, in the desert, and makes oracular pronouncements, and then there is a sort of "revival" hysteria where he is supposed to have manifested himself.

If this Emir el Hamel el Kebir takes it into his head to announce that he is the *Mahdi*, we shall get precisely what the British got from their *Mahdi* at Kartoum; for he has got the strongest tribal confederation yet known.

Well, I hope you won't be a Gordon, nor I a Wolseley-Kitchener, for it's *peace* we want now—*peace*—that we may consolidate our African Empire and then start making the desert to bloom like a rose . . .

You get a treaty made with this Emir, whereby he guarantees the trade-routes, and guarantees the *friendship* of his tributary tribes to us, and *neutrality* toward the Senussi and any other European power in Africa, and you will have created a buffer-state, just where France needs it most.

Incidentally you will have earned my undying gratitude and approbation, and what you like to ask by way of recognition of such invaluable work. . . . . We *must* have peace in the East in view of the fact that the Riffs will always give trouble in the West.

Sanction for the subsidy may come any day, but you will have plenty of time for your preparations. When you get word, be gone *in the same hour*, and let *nothing whatsoever* delay you for a minute.

D'Auray de Redon came through from Kufara with one of Ibrahim Maghruf's caravans and saw this *Mahdi* or Prophet himself. He also takes a very serious view, and thinks it means a *jehad* sooner or later.

The fellow is already a very noted miracle-monger and has a tremendous reputation as a warrior. He is to the Emir Mohammed Bishari bin Mustapha Korayim abd Rabu what the eagle is to the hawk—a dead hawk, too, according to an Arab who fell in with Ibrahim Maghruf's caravan when fleeing from a great slaughter at the Pass of Bab-el-Haggar, where this new Prophet obliterated the Emir Mohammed Bishari. The said Arab was so bitter about the "Prophet" and had such a personal grudge that D'Auray de Redon cultivated him with talk of revenge and gold, and we may be able to make great use of him. I shall send him to you at Zaguig with d'Auray de Redon who will bring you word to start, and any orders that I do not care to write.

In conclusion: regard this as the *most important thing in the world*—to yourself, to me *and to France.*

Attached to this letter was a sheet of note-paper on which was written that which, later, gave me furiously to think, and at the time saddened and depressed me. I wondered if it were intended as a warning. For it was not like my uncle to write me mere Service news.

By the way, I have broken de Lannec, as I promised him (and you, too) that I would do anyone who failed me . . . *A woman, of course* . . . He had my most strict and stringent orders to go absolutely straight and instantly to the Holy City and establish himself there, relieving St. André,

with whom it was vitally important that I should have a personal interview within the month.

Passing through the Zarbour, de Lannec got word from one of our "friendlies" that a missing Frenchwoman was in a village among the mountains. She was the wife of a French officer, and had been carried off during the Fez massacre, and was in the *hareem* of the big man of the place. It seems de Lannec had known her in Paris . . . loved her, perhaps . . . *He turned aside from his duty;* he wasted a week in getting the woman, another in placing her in safety, and *then* was so good as to attend to the affairs of his General, his Service and his Country! *Exit de Lannec* . . .

Serve him right, of course! . . . Yes, of course . . . A little hard . . . Very, very sad—for he was a most promising officer, a tiger in battle and a fox on Secret Service; no braver, cleverer, finer fellow in the French army . . . But yes, it served him right . . . Certainly . . . He had acted very wrongly—putting personal feelings and the fate of one woman before the welfare of France, before the orders of his commander, before the selfless self-effacing tradition of his Service . . . In short, before his god—Duty.

He deserved his punishment . . . Yes . . . He had put a mere woman before Duty . . . *"Exit de Lannec"* . . . Serve him right, poor devil! . . .

And then the imp that dwells at the back of my mind said to the angel that dwells at the front of my mind:

"Suppose the captured woman, dwelling in that unthinkable slavery of pollution and torture, had been that beautiful queenly and adored lady, the noble wife of the stern General Bertrand de Beaujolais himself?"

Silence, vile imp! *No one* comes before Duty. Duty is a jealous god . . .

I was to think more about de Lannec ere long.

I CONFESS to beginning with a strong dislike for the extremely beautiful Miss Vanbrugh, when I met her at dinner, at Colonel Levasseur's, with her brother.

Her brother, by the way, was an honorary ornament of the American Embassy at Paris, and was spending his leave with his adventurous sister and her maid-companion in "doing" Algeria, and seeing something of the desert. The Colonel had rather foolishly consented to their coming to Zaguig "to see something of the *real* desert and of Empire in the making," as Otis Hawkinson Vanbrugh had written to him.

I rather fancy that the *beaux yeux* of Miss Mary, whom Colonel Levasseur had met in Paris and at Mustapha Supérieur, had more to do with it than a desire to return the Paris hospitality of her brother.

Anyhow, a young girl had no business to be there at that time.

Probably my initial lack of liking for Mary Vanbrugh was prompted by her curious attitude toward myself and my utter inability to fathom and understand her. The said attitude was one of faintly mocking mild amusement, and I have not been accustomed to regard myself as an unintentionally amusing person! In fact I have generally found people rather chary of laughing at me if they could not laugh with me.

But not so Mary Vanbrugh.

And for some obscure reason she affected to suppose that my name was "Ivan." Even at dinner that first evening, when she sat on Levasseur's right and my left, she addressed me as "Major Ivan."

To my stiff query, "Why *Ivan*, Miss Vanbrugh?" her half-suppressed provoking smile would dimple her very beautiful cheeks, as she replied:

"But surely . . . You *are* really Ivan What's-his-name in disguise, aren't you? Colonel Levasseur told me you are a most distinguished Intelligence Officer on Secret Service, and I think that must be one of the secrets."

I was puzzled and piqued. Certainly I have played many parts in the course of an adventurous career, but my duties have never brought me in contact with Russians, nor have I ever adopted a Russian disguise and name. Who *was* this Ivan What's-his-name? . . . However, if the joke amused her . . . and I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh, *do* do that again, Major Ivan," she said. "It was so delightfully French and expressive! You dear people can talk with your shoulders and eyebrows as eloquently as we barbarous Americans can with our tongues."

"Yes—we are amusing little funny foreigners, Mademoiselle," I observed. "And if, as Ivan What's-his-name, I have made you smile, I have not lived wholly in vain."

"No, you have not, Major Ivan," she agreed.

A cooler, calmer creature I have never encountered . . . A man might murder her, but he would never fluster nor discompose her serenity while she lived.

Level-eyed, slow-spoken, unhurried, she was something new and strange to me, and she intrigued me in spite of myself.

Before that evening finished, and I had to leave that wide moonlit veranda, her low rich voice, extreme self-possession, poise, grace and perfection almost brought me to her feet, in spite of her annoying air of ironic mockery, her mildly contemptuous amusement at me, my sayings and my doings.

As I made my way back to my quarters by the Bab-el-Souq, I found myself saying, "Who the devil is this Ivan What's-his-name?" and trying to re-capture an air that she had hummed once or twice as I sat coldly after some piece of slightly mocking irony. How did it go? I tried to whistle a few bars from memory, without much success. But I knew I hadn't heard it for the last time.

CHAPTER VI

JACKALS AND HYENAS

MISS VANBRUGH'S interest in native life was insatiable. She was a living interrogation-mark, and to me she turned, on the advice of the overworked Levasseur, for information, as it was supposed that what I did not know about the Arab, in all his moods and tenses, was not worth knowing.

I was able to bring that sparkling, dancing flash of pleasure to her eyes, that seemed literally to light them up, although already as bright as stars, by promising to take her to dinner with my old friend Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf.

At his house she would have a real Arab dinner in real Arab fashion, be able to see exactly how a wealthy native lived, and to penetrate into the innermost arcana of a real *hareem*.

I HAD absolute faith in old Ibrahim Maghruf, and I had known him for many years and in many places.

Not only was he patently and provenly honest and reliable in himself, but his son and heir was in France, and much of his money in French banks and companies. He was a most lovable old chap, and most interesting, too. But still he was a native, when all is said, and his heart was Arab.

It was difficult to realize, seeing him seated cross-legged upon his cushions and rugs in the marble-tiled French-Oriental reception-room of his luxurious villa, that he was a self-made man who had led his caravans from Siwa to Timbuctu, from Wadai to Algiers, and had fought in a hundred fights for his property and life against the Tebu, Zouaia, Chambaa, Bedouin and Touareg robbers of the

desert. He had indeed fulfilled the Arab saying: "A man should not sleep on silk until he has walked on sand."

Now he exported dates to France, imported cotton goods from Manchester, and was a merchant-prince in Islam. And I had the pleasant feeling that old Ibrahim Maghruf loved me for myself, without *arrière pensée*, and apart from the value of my reports to Government on the subject of his services, his loyalty and his influence.

In his house I was safe, and in his hands my secret (that I was a French Intelligence officer) was safe; so if, in the maximum of gossip, inquiry and research, I told him the minimum of truth, I told him no untruth whatsoever. He, I believe, responded with the maximum of truth and the minimum of untruth, as between a good Mussulman and a delightful, friendly and useful Hell-doomed Infidel.

Anyhow, my disguise, my *hejin* camels—of the finest breed, brindled gray-and-white, bluish-eyed, lean, slender greyhounds of the desert—good for a steady ten kilometres an hour—and my carefully selected outfit of necessities, watched night and day by my Sudanese orderly, Djikki, were safe in his charge.

IT was on calling at the Vanbrughs' quarters, in the big house occupied by Colonel Levasseur, to take Miss Vanbrugh to Sidi Maghruf's, that I first encountered the pretty and piquant Maudie—an artless and refreshing soul. She met me in the veranda, showed me into the drawing-room, and said that Miss Vanbrugh would be ready in half a minute.

I wondered if she were as flirtatious as she looked . . .

MAUDIE ATKINSON, I learned later, was a London girl—a trained parlor-maid who had attracted Miss Vanbrugh's notice and liking, by her great courage, coolness and resource on the occasion of a disastrous fire in the English country-house at which Miss Vanbrugh was visiting. Maudie had been badly burnt in going to the rescue of a fellow-servant, and had then broken an arm in jumping out of a window.

Visiting the girl in the cottage-hospital, and finding that she would be homeless and workless when she left the hospital, Miss Vanbrugh had offered her the post of maid-companion, and, in her democratic American way, treated her much more as companion than maid . . .

When asked in Paris, by Miss Vanbrugh, if she were willing to accompany her to Africa, Maudie had replied:

"Oh, Miss! That's where the Sheikhs live, isn't it?"

And on being assured that she need not be afraid of falling into the hands of Arabs, had replied:

"Oh, Miss! I'd give anything in the world to be carried off by a Sheikh! They *are* such lovely men. I *adores* Sheikhs!"

Further inquiries established the fact of Maudie's belief that Sheikhs were wealthy persons, clad in silken robes, exhaling an odor of attar-of-roses, residing on the backs of wondrous Arab steeds when not in more wondrous silken tents—slightly sunburnt. Young Lochinvars, in fact, and, like that gentleman, of most amazingly oncoming disposition; and, albeit deft and delightful, amorous beyond all telling.

"Oh, Miss," Maudie had added, "they catches you up into their saddles and gallops off with you into the sunset! No good smacking their faces, neither, for they don't take 'No' for an answer when there're looking out for a wife . . . "

"Or wives," Miss Vanbrugh had observed.

"Not if you're the first, Miss. They're true to you. And they fair *burn* your lips with hot kisses, Miss."

"You can do that much for yourself with hot tea, Maudie. Where did you learn so much about Shiekhs?"

"Oh—I've got a book all about a Sheikh, Miss. By a lady . . . "

"Wonder whether the fair sob-sister ever left her native shores, or saw all her Sheikhs in the movies, Maudie?" was Miss Vanbrugh's dampening reply.

And when she told me all this, I could almost have wished that Maudie's authoress could herself have been carried off by one of the dirty, smelly desert-thieves; lousy, ruffianly and vile, who are much nearer the average "Sheikh" of fact than are those of the false and vain imaginings of her fiction . . .

THE dinner was a huge success, and I am not sure which of the two, Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf or Miss Mary Vanbrugh, enjoyed the other the more.

On my translating Ibrahim's courteous and sonorous "*Keif halak*, Sitt Miriyam! All that is in this house is yours," she had replied:

"What a bright old gentleman! Is not he too cute and sweet? I certainly should like to kiss him."

And I had translated this as:

"The Sitt admires all that you have and prays God may make you strong to enjoy it." Then we got down to business, and old Ibrahim did his best to do us to death with the noblest and most monstrous feast by which I was ever defeated.

A gazelle stalked solemnly in from the garden and pattered over the marble floor.

"Major Ivan, it isn't gazelles that Grandpapa Maghruf should pet," groaned Miss Vanbrugh, as the thirty-seventh high-piled dish was laid on the red cloth at our feet. "It's boa-constrictors."

However, the feast ended at long last and we got away, surprised at our power to carry our burden, and staggered home through the silent moon-lit night, preceded by Dufour and followed by Achmet (my splendid faithful servant, loving and beloved —Allah rest his brave soul!), and also by Djikki, for I was taking no chances.

Next day, at an hour before sunset, the good Colonel Levasseur, in his wisdom, had decreed a formal and full-dress parade of the entire garrison, to salute the Flag and "to impress the populace." It seemed to me that he would certainly impress the populace with the fact of the utter inadequacy of his force, and I should have liked nothing better than to tell him so.

But, then, the good Levasseur did not like me and I wondered whether it was on account of Miss Vanbrugh or the fact that he was twenty years my senior and but one grade my superior in rank. Nor did I myself greatly love the good Levasseur, a man very much *du peuple*, with his stubble hair, goggle-eyes, bulbous nose, purple face and enormous mustache, like the curling horns of a buffalo.

But I must be just to the brave Colonel—for he died in Zaguig with a reddened sword in one hand and an emptied revolver in the other, at the head of his splendid Zouaves; and he gave me some of the best minutes of my life.

Cursing *ce bon* Levasseur, I clattered down the wooden stairs of my billet, in full rig, spurred cavalry-boots and sword and all, out into a narrow stinking lane, turned to the right—and began running as I believe I have never run before or since, not even when I won the quarter-mile at Eton.

For I had seen a sight which made

the blood run cold throughout my body and yet boil in my head.

A woman in white riding-kit, on a big horse, followed by a gang of men, was galloping across an open space.

One of the men, racing level with her, and apparently holding to her stirrup with one hand, drove a great knife into her horse's heart with the other, just as she smashed him across the head with her riding-crop.

As the horse lurched and fell, the woman sprang clear and dashed through the open gate of a compound. It all happened in less time than it takes to tell, and by the time she was through the gate, followed by the Arabs, I was not twenty yards behind.

Mon Dieu! How I ran—and blessed Levasseur's officiousness as I ran—for there was only one woman in Zaguig who rode astride officers' chargers; only one who wore boots and breeches, long coat and white *solar-topi*.

By the mercy of God I was just in time to see the last of her pursuers vanish up a wooden outside stair that led to the flat roof of a building in this compound; a sort of firewood-and-hay-store, now locked up and entirely deserted, like the streets, by reason of the review.

As I reached the roof, with bursting lungs and dry mouth, I saw Miss Vanbrugh in a corner, her raised riding-crop reversed in her hand, as, with set mouth and protruding chin, she faced the bloodthirsty and bestial fanatics, who, to my horror, I saw to be armed with swords as well as long knives.

In view of the stringent regulations of the Arms Act, this meant that the inevitable rising and massacre was about to begin, or had already begun.

It was no moment for kid-gloved warfare nor the niceties of chivalrous fighting, and I drove my sword through the back of one man who was in the very act of yelling, "Hack her in pieces and throw her to the dogs!" And I had cut half-way through the neck of another before it was realized that the flying feet behind them had not been those of a brother.

My rush carried me through to Miss Vanbrugh, and as I wheeled about, I laid one black throat open to the bone and sent my point through another filthy and ragged *jellabia* in the region of its owner's fifth rib.

And then the rest were on me, and it was parry, and parry, and parry for dear life, with no chance to do anything else—until suddenly a heavy crop fell crashing on an Arab wrist and I could thrust home, as the stricken hand swerved.

Only two remained, and, as I took on my hilt a smashing blow aimed at my head, dropped my point into the brute's face, and thrust hard—the while I expected the other man's sword in my side—I was aware, with the tail of my eye, of a pair of white-clad arms flung around a black neck from behind.

As the great sword of the disconcerted Arab went wildly up, I sprang sideways and thrust beneath his armpit.

Then I sat me down, panting like a dog, and fought for breath; while from among seven bodies, some yet twitching in the pool of blood, a spouting Thing dragged itself by its fingers and toes toward the stairs.

Had I been a true hero of romance, I should have struck an attitude, leaning on my dripping sword, and awaited applause. In point of actual fact, I felt sick and shaky.

"The boys seem—er—a little *fresh*," complained a cool, quiet voice, and I looked up from my labors of breath-getting. She was pale, but calm and collected, though splashed with blood from head to foot.

"*Some* dog-fight, Major Ivan," she said. "Are you hurt?"

"No, Miss Vanbrugh," I answered.

"Scratched and chipped a bit, that's all. You saved my life, my dear friend."

"Nonsense," came the reply. "What about mine? I certainly was in some trouble when you strolled in. And I was *mad* that I couldn't explain to these beauties that this was the first time I had ever come out without my little gun! I could have wept at myself."

Then after a solemn moment:

"Major, I'm going to be just a little bit sick. . . . I've got to go home, right now. . . . Steward! Basin! . . ."

I wiped my sword, sheathed it, picked her up, and carried her like a baby straight to my quarters. That I had heard no rifle-fire nor mob-howling showed that the revolt had not begun. . . . Achmet was on guard at my door, but Dufour had taken his place at the review as I had told him.

I laid her on my bed, brought cognac and water, and said:

"Listen, Miss Vanbrugh. I am going to bring your maid here. Don't you dare to go out of this room till I return with her—in fact Achmet won't let you. There's going to be hell tonight—or sooner—and you'll be safer here than at the Governor's house until I can get *burkahs* and *barracans* for you and the maid, and smuggle you down to Ibrahim Maghruf's."

"But what about all the pretty soldier-boys? Won't they deal with the Arabs?"

"Yes, while they're alive to do it," I replied, and ran off.

Not a soul in the streets! A very bad sign, though fortunate for my immediate purpose of getting Maudie to my quarters unseen.

I had not far to go, and was thankful to find she was at home. Otis Vanbrugh had gone out. I noted that the maid was exhilarated and thrilled, rather than frightened and anxious, when I explained that there was likely to be trouble.

"Just like Jenny What's-her-name, the Scotch girl in the Indian Mutiny. . . . You know, sir, the Siege of Lucknow and the bagpipes and all that. . . . I know a bit of po'try about it. . . . Gimme half a mo', sir, and I'll put some things together for Miss Mary. . . . Lumme! What a lark!" and as the droll, brave little soul bustled off, I swear she murmured *"Sheikhs!"*

Sheikhs! A lark! *Une escapade!* . . . And suppose the house of Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf was the first that was looted and burnt by a victorious blood-mad mob, as being the house of a rich, renegade friend of the Hell-doomed Infidel? . . .

"Hurry, Maudie," I shouted, and out she came with a big portmanteau, her pretty face alight and alive at the anticipation of her "lark." Taking the portmanteau, I hurried her, at top speed, back to the Bab-el-Souq.

"Oh, my Gord! Look!" ejaculated poor Maudie as we came to where the slaughtered horse lay in its blackening pool, and a Thing still edged along with toes and fingers, leaving a trail. It must have rolled down those stairs. . . .

Some of the bloom was gone from the "lark" for the gay little Cockney, and from her bright cheeks, too.

FOR me, a stiff cognac and water, and off again, this time to the house of Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf. It was useless to go to Colonel Levasseur yet. I had said all I could say, and he had got all his men—for the moment—precisely where they ought to be, all in one place, under one command; and if the rising came while they were there, so much the better.

I would see Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf, and then, borrowing a horse, ride to

Levasseur, tell him of the attack on Miss Vanbrugh, assure him that the rising would be that night, and beg him to act accordingly.

Sidi Ibrahim Maghruf's house, as usual, appeared to be deserted, empty and dead. From behind high blind walls rose a high blind house, and from neither of the lanes that passed the place could a window be seen.

My private and particular knock with my sword hilt—two heavy, two light, and two heavy—brought a trembling ancient to the iron-plated wicket in the tremendously heavy door. It was good old Ali Mansour.

I stepped inside and the old mummy, whose eye was still bright and wits keen, gave me a message which I doubt not was word for word as his master and owner had delivered it to him.

"Ya, Sidi, the Protection of the Prophet and the Favor of Allah upon thy honored head. . . . My master has been suddenly called away upon a journey to a far place, and this slave is alone here with Djikki the Sudanese soldier. This slave is to render faithful account to Your Excellency of his property in the camel-sacks; and Djikki, the Sudanese, is ready with the beautiful camels. The house of my Master and all that is in it is at the disposal of the Sidi, and these words of my Master are for the Sidi's ear: *'Jackals and hyenas enter the cave of the absent lion to steal his meat!'* " . . .

Quite so. The wily Ibrahim knew more than he had said. He had cleared out in time, taking his family and money, until after the massacre of the tiny garrison and the subsequent looting was over, the town had been recaptured, a sharp lesson taught it, and an adequate garrison installed. . . . There is a time to run like the hare and a time to hunt with the hounds.

No—this would be no place to which to bring the two women.

I ordered the ancient Ali to tell Djikki to saddle me a horse quickly, and then to fetch me any women's clothing he could find—*tobhs*, *aabaias*, *foutas*, *guenaders*, *haiks*—any mortal thing he could produce of female attire.

My big Sudanese, grinning all over his hideous face, brought the horse from the huge stables in the big compound reserved for camels, asses, mules, well-bullocks, milch-cows and goats, and I once again gave him the strictest orders to have everything absolutely ready for a desert journey at ten minutes notice.

"It always is, Sidi," he grinned. "On my head and my life be it."

There are times when I love these huge, childish and lazy, fierce, staunch Sudanese. They are like coal-black English bulldogs—if there are such things.

I again told him where to take the camels and baggage, by way of the other gate, if the mob attacked the house.

The ancient returning with the bundle, I bade Djikki run with it to my quarters and give it to his old pal Achmet, and to come back at once.

I then mounted and rode off through the strangely silent town, to where Colonel Levasseur was holding his futile parade in the vast market-square; a poor handful consisting of his Third Zouaves, a company of Tirailleurs Algériens—possibly none too loyal when the Cry of the Faith went up, and the Mullahs poured forth from the mosques to head a Holy War—and a half squadron of Chasseurs d'Afrique.

What were these against a hundred thousand fanatics, each anxious to attain remission of sins, and Paradise, by the slaying of an Infidel, a *giaour*, a *meleccha*, a dog whose mere exist-

ence was an affront and an offence to the One God?

There should have been a strong brigade and a battery of artillery in the place. . . . The old, old story of the work of the soldier ruined by the hand of the politician.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MINARET

A DENSE and silent throng watched the review, every house-top crowded, every balcony filled, though no women were visible, and you could have walked on the heads of the people in the Square and in every street and lane leading to the Square, save four, at the ends of which Levasseur had placed pickets—for the easier scattering of his little force after the Parade finished!

By one of these empty streets I rode, and through an ocean of sullen faces, to where the Governor sat his horse, his *officier d'ordonnance* behind him, with a bugler and a four of Zouave drummers.

The band of the Third Zouaves was playing the *Marseillaise,* and I wondered if its wild strains bore any message to the silent thousands who watched motionless, save when their eyes turned expectantly to the minaret of the principal mosque. . . . To the minaret. . . . Expectantly? . . . Of course!

It was from there that the signal would come. On to that high-perched balcony, like a swallow's nest on that lofty tower, the muezzin would step at sunset. The deep diapason of his wonderful voice would boom forth the *shehada,* the Moslem profession of faith, *"Ash hadu illa illaha ill Allah, wa ash hadu inna Mohammed an rasul Allah."*

He would recite the *mogh'reb* prayer, and then—then he would raise his arms to Allah and call curses on the Infidel; his voice would break into a scream of "Kill! Kill!" and from beneath every dirty *jellabia* would come sword and knife, from every house-top a blast of musketry. . . . I could see it all. . . .

"You are late, Major," growled the Governor, accusingly and offensively, as I rode up.

"I am, Colonel," I agreed, "but I am alive. Which none of us will be in a few hours unless you'll take my advice and expect to be attacked at odds of a hundred to one, in an hour's time."

And I told him of Miss Vanbrugh's experience.

"Oh, you Intelligence people and your mare's nests! A gang of rude little street-boys, I expect!" laughed this wise man, and ten minutes later dismissed the parade—the men marching off in five detachments, to the four chief gates of the city and to the Colonel's own headquarters, respectively.

As the troops left the Square, the mob, still silent, closed in, and every eye was turned unwaveringly to the minaret of the mosque. . . .

I RODE back toward my quarters, cudgeling my brains as to the best thing to do with the two girls. The Governor's house would be in the thick of the fighting, and it was more than probable that Ibrahim Maghruf's house would be looted and burnt.

Yes, they would perhaps be safest in my quarters, in Arab dress, with Achmet to defend them with tongue and weapons. I had better send for Otis Vanbrugh, too, and give him a chance to save himself, if he'd listen to reason, and to look after his sister. But my house was known as the habitation of a Franzawi officer. . . .

And I myself would be in an awkward dilemma, for it was no part of my duty to get killed in the gutters of Zaguig when my uncle was relying on me to be setting off on the job of my

life—that should crown the work of *his*. Nor was it any part of my inclination to sit cowering in any upper back room with two women and a civilian, while my comrades fought their last fight. . . .

As I swung myself down from my horse, by the door of the lane at the back of my house, I was conscious of a very filthy and ragged Arab, squatting against the wall on a piece of foul old horse-blanket, his staff, begging-bowl and rosary beside him. He begged and held out his hand, quavering for alms in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate—*"Bismillah arahman arahmin!"* in Arabic; and then in French, sharply and low: *"Start at once!"*

The creature's eyes were bloodshot and red-rimmed, his mangily bearded cheeks were gaunt and hollow, his ribs showed separate and ridged through the rents in his foul *jellabia*, and a wisp of rag failed to cover his dusty shaggy hair. And at the third stare I saw that it was my friend, the beautiful and smart Captain Raoul d'Auray de Redon.

I winked at him, led my horse to the stable on the other side of the courtyard, and ran up the wooden stair at the back of the house.

So it had come!

I thought of my uncle's letter and the underlined words—*"begone in the same hour!"*

I tore off my uniform, pulled on my Arab kit, the dress of a good class Bedouin, complete from *agal*-bound *kafiyeh* to red leather *fil-fil* boots; and as I did this and rubbed dye into my face and hands, I thought of a dozen things at once—chiefly of the fate of the two girls.

I could not leave them alone in this empty house, and it would be delivering them to death to take them back to the Governor's villa.

I shouted for Achmet and learned that he had given the Arab clothing to Miss Vanbrugh.

"Run to the house of His Excellency the Governor, and tell the Roumi Americani lord, Vanbrugh, the brother of the Sitt Miriyam Vanbrugh, to come here in greatest haste. Tell him the Sitt is in danger here. Go on the horse that is below, and give it to the Americani. . . ."

This was ghastly. I should be *escaping in disguise* from Zaguig, at the very time my brothers-in-arms were fighting for their lives. . . . I should be leaving Mary Vanbrugh to death or to that which usually was the fate of white women at the hands of "sheikhs" gone mad. . . .

I ran down the stairs again and glanced round the courtyard, beckoning to Raoul, who was now sitting just inside the gate. Turning back, I snatched up a cold chicken and a loaf from my larder and, followed by Raoul, hurried back to my room to make a bundle of my uniform.

Wringing Raoul's hand, I told him to talk while he ate and I worked. He told me all about the Emir upstart and about the guide, as he drew a route on my map.

"The tribes are up all round the northwest of here," he said later, "and hurrying in. It's for sunset this evening, as I suppose you have found out."

"Yes. And I warned Levasseur. But he's besotted. . . . Says they'd never dare do anything while he and his Zouaves are here! And he's got them scattered in small detachments—and, Roaul, there are two *white* girls here."

"Where?" interrupted my friend.

"In the next room," I answered, and hurriedly told him about them.

"God help them!" he said. "They'll be alone in an hour."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "Are you to come with me?"

"No. The General doesn't want us

both killed by this Emir lad, he says. And he thinks you're the man to pull it off now that poor de Lannec's gone. . . . I confess I begged him to let me go, as it was I who brought him confirmation of the news. He said it was your right to have the chance, Henri, on your seniority rank as well as your record, apart from the fact that you'd handle the situation better than I. . . . Said it was such almost certain death, too, that he'd prefer to send his own nephew! . . . I nearly wept, old chap, but he was absolutely right. You *are* the man."

Noble loyal soul! Steel-true and generous—knowing not the very name of jealousy! He gave me every ounce of help, information and guidance that it lay in his power to do.

"No—I'm not even to come with you, Henri. . . . I shall join the mob here and lead them all over the shop on false scents. Confuse their councils and start rumors that there's a big French army at the gates and so on. Then I'll get back with the news of what's happened here. . . ."

There came a bang at the door; Raoul crouched in a dark corner and Otis Vanbrugh burst in, followed by Achmet.

"Where's my sister?" he shouted, looking wildly round and seeing, as he thought, two Arabs.

"I am Major de Beaujolais, Mr. Vanbrugh," said I. "Your sister and her maid are in the next room putting on Arab dresses. There will be a rising this evening and a massacre. . . . The worst place for you and your sister will be the Governor's house. Will you hide here until it's over, and try to keep alive somehow until the French troops arrive? Levasseur will start telegraphing the moment fighting begins, but it'll be a matter of days before they can get here—even if the wires aren't cut already—and you and the girls will be the sole living white people in the city. . . . If you don't starve and aren't discovered. . . . Anyhow, your only chance is to hide here with the girls."

"Hide be damned!" burst out Vanbrugh. "I shall fight alongside my host and his men!"

"And your sister?" I asked.

"She'll fight, too. Good as a man with a gun."

"And when the end comes?" I said gently.

"Isn't there a chance?" he asked.

"Not the shadow of a ghost of a chance," I said. "Five little scattered detachments—each against ten thousand! They'll be smothered by sheer numbers. And you have never seen an African mob out for massacre and loot."

"Let's talk to my sister," he grunted abruptly and dashed out of the room.

"Un brave!" said Raoul, as we followed.

He was; and yet he was a gentle, refined and scholarly person, an ascetic-looking bookman and ornament of Chancelleries. I had thought of James Lane Allen and Kentucky Cardinals for some reason when I first met him.

In the next room were two convincing Arab females, each peering at us through the muslin-covered slit in the all-enveloping *bourkha* that covered her from head to foot.

"Say, Otis, what d'you know about *that?*" said one of the figures and spun round on her heel.

"Oh, *sir,*" said the other, "isn't it a *lark?* Oh, *Sheikhs!*"

"Oh, shucks! you mean," replied Vanbrugh, and hastily laid the situation before his sister.

"And what does Major Ivan say?" inquired she. "I think we'd better go with him. Doesn't he look cunning in his Arab glad rags?"

I think I should have turned pale but for my Arab dye.

"I'm leaving Zaguig at once," I said.

"Not *escaping?*" she asked.

"I am leaving Zaguig at once," I repeated.

"Major de Beaujolais has just received dispatches," said Raoul in English, "and has to go."

"How *very* convenient for the Major!" replied Mary Vanbrugh. "And who's *this* nobleman, anyhow, might one ask?"

"Let me present Captain Raoul d'Auray de Redon," said I, indicating the filthy beggar.

"Well, don't present him too close. . . . Pleased to meet you, Captain. You *escaping*, too?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I am not escaping," said Raoul, and added, "neither is Major de Beaujolais. He is going on duty, infinitely against his will at such a time. But he's also going to dangers quite as great as those in Zaguig at this moment. . . ."

I could have embraced my friend.

Miss Vanbrugh considered this.

"Then I think perhaps I'll go with him," she said. "Come on, Maudie. Grab the grip. I suppose you'll stay and fight, Otis? Good-by, dear old boy, take care of yourself." And she threw her arms round her brother's neck.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a girl!" Raoul laughed.

"You have heard of the frying-pan and the fire, Miss Vanbrugh?" I began.

"Yes, and of pots and pans and cabbages and kings. I'm quite tired of this gay city, anyway, and I'm coming along to see this Where-is-it place."

Vanbrugh turned to me.

"For God's sake take her," he said, "and Maudie, too."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Maudie, thinking doubtless of Sheikhs.

"Why—surely," chimed in Miss Vanbrugh. "Think of Major Ivan's good name. He must be chaperoned."

"I'm sorry, Vanbrugh," I said. "I can't take your sister. I'm going on a Secret Service mission—of the greatest importance and the greatest danger. And my instructions are to go as nearly alone as is possible. I'm taking only three natives and a white subordinate as guide, camel-man and cook and so forth. . . . So, you see, it's impossible, and I think she'd be safer here."

But he drew me aside and whispered:

"Good God, man, I'm her brother! I *can't* shoot her at the last. You are a stranger. There is a *chance* for her, surely, with you. . . ."

Someone came up the stair and to the door. It was Dufour in Arab dress. He had hurried back and changed in his quarters.

"We should be out of this in a few minutes, sir, I think," he said. "They are only waiting for the muezzin. Hundreds followed each detachment to the gates. . . ."

"We *shall* be out of it in a few minutes, Dufour," I answered. "Get on down to Ibrahim Maghruf's. Take Achmet. Don't forget anything—food, water, rifles, ammunition, compasses. See that Achmet takes my uniform. I'll be there in ten minutes."

"Let the gentle Achmet take the grip, then," said Miss Vanbrugh, indicating her portmanteau.

Raoul touched my arm.

"Take the two girls in a *bassourah*," he whispered. "It would add to your plausibility, in a way, to have a *hareem* with you. You might be able to hand them over to a north-bound caravan, too, with promise of a tremendous reward if they're taken safely to a French outpost."

"Look here, couldn't Vanbrugh ride northwest with them himself?" I suggested. "He's a plucky chap and . . ."

"And can't speak a word of Arabic.

. . . Not the ghost of a chance. The country's swarming, I tell you. They wouldn't get a mile. Too late . . ."

"Wouldn't *you* . . .?" I began.

"Stop it, Henri," he answered. "No de Lannec foolishness for me! My job's here and you know it. I may be able to do a lot of good when they get going. Mobs always follow and anybody who's got a definite plan and a loud voice and bloody-minded urgings. . . ."

"De Beaujolais—what can I say? I implore you . . ." began Vanbrugh.

"Very well," I said. "On the distinct understanding that I take no responsibility for Miss Vanbrugh, that she realizes what she is doing, and that I shall not deviate a hair's breadth from what I consider my duty. . . ."

"Oh, Major! You *are* so pressing! Come on, Maudie, we're going from certain death to sure destruction. So cheer up, child, and let's get busy. . . ."

I turned away as Vanbrugh crushed the girl to his breast, and with a last look round my room, I led the way down the stairs and out into the deserted silent street, my ears tingling for the first mob-howl, the first rifle-shot.

I could do a *little*, perhaps, for these unfortunate people, without being another de Lannec!

CHAPTER VIII

THE MINARET SPEAKS

WE WERE an ordinary enough party. Two sturdy desert Bedouins, Dufour and I, followed by two heavily-shrouded females and trailed by a whining beggar—Raoul.

I had refused to let Vanbrugh come to Ibrahim Maghruf's house with us, partly because his only chance of not being torn to pieces in the streets was to get quickly back to the Governor's, where he could use a rifle with the rest, partly because I wanted him to take a last message and appeal to the Governor, and partly because I did not want a European to be seen going into Ibrahim's, should the place be watched.

I had taken farewell of him in the compound of my quarters, swearing to do what I conscientiously could, for his sister, and feeling that I was saying good-by to a heroic man, already as good as dead.

He would not listen to a word about escaping from the town and taking his chance with my party until we were well away.

He didn't desert friends in danger, he said, and, with a silent hand-grip and nod, we parted—he to hurry to his death, and I to take his sister out into the savage desert and the power of more savage fanatics—if she were not killed or captured on the way.

ALL was ordered confusion and swift achievement at Ibrahim Maghruf's house as the splendid riding-camels were saddled and the special trotting baggage-camels were loaded with the long-prepared necessities of the journey.

Here Raoul presented to me a very big, powerful, and surly Arab, apparently named Suleiman the Strong, who was to be my guide. He was the man who had escaped from one of the Emir's slaughters and been picked up by the caravan in which Raoul had been carrying on his work, disguised as a camel-driver.

This man actually knew the *"Mahdi,"* having had the honor of being tortured by him personally; and apparently he only lived for his revenge. I thought he should be an extremely useful person, as he knew the wells and water-holes on the route, though I did not like his face and did not intend to trust him an inch further than was necessary.

Anyhow, he would lead me to the Great Oasis all right, for he had much to gain in the French Service—pay, promotion and pension—and nothing to lose.

Luckily there were spare camels, left behind by Ibrahim Maghruf, as well as my own; and Djikki and Achmet soon had a *bassourab* (a striped hooped tent, shaped something like a balloon) onto a riding-camel for the girls, and another baggage-camel loaded with extra sacks of dates, *girbas* of water and bags of rice, tea, coffee, sugar and salt, as well as tinned provision.

As I was helping the girls into the *bassourab*, showing them how to sit most comfortably—or least uncomfortably—and giving them strictest injunctions against parting the curtains until I gave permission, Raoul touched my arm.

"Better go, Major," he said. "It's begun! Hark!"

As he spoke, a growing murmur, of which I had been subconsciously aware for some minutes—a murmur like the sound of a distant sea breaking on a pebbly beach—rose swiftly to a roar, menacing and dreadful, a roar above which individual yells rang clear like leaping spray above the waves. Rifles banged irregularly and then came crash after crash of steady volley-firing. . . .

"*En avant—marche!*" said I; the old mummy opened the compound gate, and I rode out first, on my giant camel, followed by Djikki leading the one that bore the two girls. After them rode Suleiman, in charge of the baggage-camels, behind which came Achmet. Last of all rode Dufour.

In a minute, Raoul ran along the narrow lane in front of us. As we turned into the street that led to the southeastern gate—luckily not one of the four at which poor Levasseur had stationed detachments—a mob of country-dwelling tribesmen came running along it, waving swords, spears, long guns and good rifles above their heads, and yelling "Kill! Kill!"

"Halt! Back!" I shouted to Djikki, and brought my little caravan to a standstill at the mouth of the lane, wondering if our journey was to end here in Zaguig. I had my rifle ready, and Dufour, Djikki, Achmet and Suleiman pushed up beside me with theirs. . . .

The mob drew level.

"Good-by, Henri," said a voice from below me, and out in front of them bounded Captain Raoul d'Auray de Redon—a filthy dancing-dervish—spun round and round, and then, with his great staff raised in one hand and his rosary in the other, yelled:

"The Faith! The Faith! The Faith! . . . Kill! Kill! . . . This way, my brothers! . . . Quick! Quick! . . . I can show you where there are infidel dogs! . . . *White women!* Loot!" and he dashed on, followed by the mob, down the turning opposite to ours, across the main street.

That was the last I ever saw of Raoul.

IT was the last ever seen of him in life by any Frenchman, save for the glimpses that Levasseur and his comrades got, by the light of burning houses, of a wild dervish that harangued the mob just when it was about to charge, or led great sections of it off from where it could do most harm to where it could do least.

One cannot blame poor Levasseur that he supposed the man to be a blood-mad fanatical ringleader of the mob—and himself ordered and directed the volley that riddled the breast of my heroic friend and stilled forever one of the noblest hearts that ever beat for France.

AS the mob streamed off after their self-constituted leader, I gave the

word to resume the order of march, and led the way at a fast camel-trot toward and through the gate and out into the open country.

I breathed more freely outside that accursed city of the plains. Another small mob came running along the road, and I swerved off across some irrigated market-gardens to make a cord across the arc of the winding road.

A few scoundrels detached themselves from the mob and ran toward us, headed by a big brute with a six-foot gun in one hand and a great sword in the other. I did not see how he could use both. He showed me.

As they drew nearer, I raised my rifle.

"Get your *own* loot!" I snarled. "There's plenty more in Zaguig."

There was a laugh, and half of them turned back.

The leader, however, stuck his sword in the ground, knelt, and aimed his long gun at my camel. Evidently his simple system was to shoot the beasts of mounted men and then hack the head off the rider as he came to earth.

However, rifles are quicker than *jezails*, blunderbusses, snap-haunces or arquebusses, and without reluctance I shot the gentleman through the head.

My followers, who, with a disciplined restraint that delighted me, had refrained from shooting without orders, now made up for lost time, and the remainder of the tribesmen fled, doubtless under the impression that they had stirred up a hornet's nest of loot-laden Touareg.

I again pushed forward quickly, smiling to myself as I remembered the small voice that had issued from the *bassourab* after I had fired:

"A bell-ringer for Major Ivan!"

Evidently those *bassourab*-curtains had been opened in spite of what I had said.

A red glare lit the sky. The mob-howl—that most terrible and soul-shaking of all dreadful sounds—rose higher and louder and the crashing volleys of disciplined fire-control answered the myriad bangings of the guns and rifles of the mob.

At a bend of the road, I found myself right into another hurrying crowd, and I visualized the northern roads as covered with them. There was no time to swerve, and into them we rode.

"Hurry, brothers, or you'll be too late!" I shouted, and behind me my four followers yelled "Kill! Kill!" and we were through the lot, either before they realized that we were so few, or because they took us for what we were—a well-armed band from whom loot would only be snatched with the maximum of bloodshed.

And to these wild hill-tribesmen the glare of the burning city was a magnet that would have drawn them almost from their graves.

On once again, and, but for a straggler here and there, we were clear of the danger-zone.

In a couple of hours we were as much in the lonely uninhabitated desert as if we had been a hundred miles from the town.

I held the pace, however, and as we drove into the moonlit silence I tried to put from me the thoughts of what was happening in Zaguig and of the fate of my friend and of my comrades, whom harsh Duty had made me desert in their last agony.

IT was after midnight when I drew rein and gave the word to *barrak* the camels and to camp.

Before I could interfere, Djikki had brought the girls' camel to its knees, with a guttural "*Adar-ya-yan*" and with such suddenness that poor Maudie was shot head foremost out of the *bassourab* onto the sand, as a tired voice within said:

"What is it *now?* Earthquakes?"

Maudie laughed and Miss Vanbrugh crawled out of the *bassourab.*

"Major," she observed, "I'm through with the cabin of the Ship of the Desert. The deck for me. I don't ride any more in that wabbling wigwam after tonight. And there isn't *real* room for two. Not to be seasick in solid comfort."

"You'll ride exactly where and how I direct, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied.

"*Dear* Major Ivan," she smiled. "I *love* to hear him say his little piece." And, weary as she was, she hummed a bar of that eternal irritating air.

In a surprisingly short time we had the little *tents d'arbri,* which should have been mine and Dufour's, up and occupied by the girls; fires lighted, water on to boil for tea, a pot issuing savory odors, as its contents of lamb, rice, butter, vegetables and spice simmered beneath the eyes of Achmet, who turned a roasting chicken on a stick.

Maudie wanted to wait on Miss Vanbrugh and myself, but was told by her kind employer and friend to want something different. So the two girls, Dufour, and I made a *partie-carrée* at one fire, while Achmet ministered to us, and Djikki and Suleiman fed the camels and afterwards did what Miss Vanbrugh described as their "chores," about another.

After we had eaten, I made certain things clear to Miss Vanbrugh and Maudie, including the matter of the strictest economy of water for their ablutions, when we were away from oases, and the absolute necessity for the promptest and exactest obedience to my orders.

After supper, the girls retired to the stick-and-canvas camp-beds belong to Dufour and myself, and I allotted two-hour watches to Djikki, Achmet and Suleiman, with "rounds" for Dufour and myself at alternate hours.

Visiting the camels and stacked loads, I saw that all was well, as I expected from such experienced desert-men as my followers. So I rolled myself in a rug and lay down to count the stars. . . .

CHAPTER IX

MARY'S BROTHER NOEL

"GOOD-MORNING, Major Ivan," said a cool voice, at daybreak, as I issued stores and water for breakfast. "Anything in the papers this morning?"

"I hope you and Maudie slept well, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "Have you everything you want?"

"No, kind sir, she said," was the reply. "I want a hot bath and some tea, and a chafing-dish—and then I'll show you some *real* cookery."

She looked as fresh as the glorious morning, and as sweet in Arab dress as in one of her own frocks.

"You may perhaps get a bath in a week or two," I replied.

"Hot?" she asked.

"Yes. In a saucepan," I promised. "And today we're going to make a forced march," I added, "with you and Maudie safe in the *bassourab.* After that, it will have to be the natural pace of the baggage-camels and we'll travel mostly by night, and you can ride as you please."

"Why at night?" asked the girl. "Not just for my whims?"

"No. Cooler traveling," I replied, "and the camels go better. They can't see to graze, and our enemies can't see *us.*"

"Of course. I was afraid you were thinking of what I said about the *bassourab,* Major, and planning to save the women and children. . . ."

"How's Maudie?" I asked.

"All in, but cheerful," she replied.

"She's not used to riding, and her poor back's breaking."

"And yours?" I asked.

"Oh, I grew up on a horse," she laughed, "and can grow old on a camel. Let me dye my face and dress like a man, and carry a rifle, Major. Maudie could have the *bassourab* to herself then, with the curtains open."

"I'll think about it," I replied.

All that day we marched, Suleiman riding far ahead, as scout and guide.

After going my rounds that night, I had a talk with this fellow,

I learned, in the first place, that the Emir El Hamel el Kebir was a desert "foundling" of whom no one knew anything whatsoever.

This looked bad, and suggested one of the "miraculous" appearances of the late Mahdi el Senussi or an imitation of it.

Also, from Suleiman's grudging admissions, and allowing for his obvious hatred, the Emir appeared to be a mighty worker of miracles in the sight of all men, an Invincible Commander of the Faithful in battle, and a man of great ability and power.

On my trying to get some idea of the personality and character of the Emir, Suleiman could only growl——

"He is a treacherous Son of Satan. He poisoned the old Sheikh whose salt he had eaten, and he tortured me. *Me*, who should have succeeded the good old man—to whom I was as a son."

This sounded bad, but there are two sides to every story, and I could well imagine our Suleiman handsomely earning a little torture.

"I fled from the tribe," continued Suleiman, "and went to the Emir Mohammed Bishari bin Mustapha Korayim abd Rabu, who took me in and poured oil and wine into my wounds. Him also this *Emir* el Hamel el Kebir slew, falling upon him treacherously in the Pass of Bab-el-Haggar, and again I had to flee for my life. A caravan found me weeks later, at the point of death in the desert, and took me with them.

"The man who brought me to you befriended me from the first, and showed me how to make a living as well as how to get my revenge on this foul pretender and usurper. This Emir el Hamel."

And the gentle Suleiman spat vigorously.

"Are you a Franzawi, Sidi?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"Like you, I work for them," I replied. "They pay, splendidly, those who serve them well; but their vengeance is terrible upon those who betray them. And their arm is long."

"Allah smite them," he growled, then asked: "Will they send an army and wipe out this el Hamel?"

"What do I know?" I replied. "It is not for us to spy upon him and report to them, anyhow."

"Let him beware my knife," he grunted, and I bethought me that were I a Borgia, or my country another that I could mention, here would be a way of solving the problem of the new Mahdi menace.

"The Franzawi hire no assassins, nor allow assassination," I replied coldly. "Keep good watch." And I left him, pondering many things in my heart. . . .

Poor De Lannec! . . . Poor Otis Vanbrugh! . . . The Zaguig garrison! . . . Mary Vanbrugh! . . .

Oh, for a friendly north-bound caravan to whom I might give these two girls, with a reasonably easy mind, and every hope that they would be safe.

(*To be continued*)

Please remember this magazine is published twice a month.

The Dunraven Girl

By REGINALD SWEETLAND

UNLESS you understand the individual you cannot understand society, is the way Henri Bouget expressed it. Knowing this, one felt he knew much about Bouget and his methods.

Like a scientist with scalpel poised delicately—yet with an astonishing sureness of touch—over the quivering form of a butterfly, Bouget stood with his keen mind ready to probe with equal sureness into the dark, hidden convolutions of his patient's brain.

Heredity, as well as the more immediate past of the individual, fascinated this man of the slightly stooped shoulders and sunken, penetrating eyes.

As coldly calculating as a brain specialist studying symptoms, Bouget was something more than a man of science. Paradoxically speaking, he was something more than a man of science, and still something less. He was not content to look upon an individual with the objectivity of the man of science. He professed to be a humanist—that is, he allowed his imagination to play upon his findings and thereby reached conclusions which, though they seldom erred, necessarily drew from a wider field of opinions than a scientist would permit himself to stray in.

It was not to be wondered, therefore, that in this man's insatiable curiosity into conscious and unconscious motives, he should be interested in the unusual type of person. While everybody with whom he came in contact contributed s o m e t h i n g to Bouget's fund of knowledge of human nature, it was only natural that he should interest himself in criminal types. They had a great deal to offer a person of analytical bent.

Just now Bouget was in his book-cluttered study poring over the morning newspaper. The most sensational story of the day had caught his attention and he was going over the details for the third time.

The "Dunraven Girl," the celebrated canvas brought over from the British Royal Academy for American exhibition, had been the target of a vandal at the Fine Arts Exposition. Acid had been sprayed over its surface. It was a total ruin.

HERE was more than a local disgrace; it amounted to an international scandal. London art critics, as well as the public, were rampant; they seized the opportunity to insist that Americans were not only unable to appreciate one of the great treasures of the world, but also were barbaric enough to vent themselves on those who produced them.

The canvas was invaluable; nothing could replace it. One person for some insane reason was able to wreck the treasured relic of a nation, the outstanding work of art in its field produced during a century of culture.

The Dunraven Girl—that had been the talk and Mecca of the city—now lay in burned shreds in its gilt frame ready to be transported home to an indignant people, while — poor commentary — police blustered in their blunt way to apprehend the vicious culprit.

The telephone-bell rang. The paper slid to the floor as Bouget shifted

his position and, reaching for the phone at his elbow, held the receiver to his ear.

It was Edward Vincent at the other end of the wire. Vincent was custodian at the Fine Arts Salon.

"Yes," Bouget was saying into the mouthpiece, "but only from newspaper accounts. You have, eh? Was he arrested? . . . I see. . . . Yes, I should be glad to give you what little help I can. . . . And when you come, better bring with you the register . . . those who visited the place during the day. I shall be here waiting for you."

He hung up the receiver, gathered the newspaper from off the rug, filled his pipe and prepared to wait for his visitor.

He had not long to wait.

Unannounced, Vincent broke into the room. He was a tall man of middle-age and gave one the impression of having at his command a tremendous fund of unused energy. He might have been a successful business man, but one look at his eyes showed the telltale lapses of the dreamer, the unconscious effort to avoid the world of reality and to live in a mental world of his own creating.

The two men had long been friends. They shook hands and the newcomer sank into Bouget's shabby but comfortable Morris chair.

"IT'S a dastardly shame! A damnable crime!" Vincent began with feeling. "It's the defenseless trick of some cur. I'd like to lay my hands on him——"

"Come, come, Vincent, this won't help us much," broke in Bouget tranquilly. "Let us look at this thing rationally and leave as much of our personal feelings out of the matter as we can. I know how you feel about it. We all feel the same. This should be comparatively easy to solve——"

"I am glad you think so," Vincent showed considerable relief.

"You brought that list with you?"

The other nodded, and taking a slip of folded paper from his inside pocket, handed it to Bouget. The latter glanced down it.

"These people were present when it happened?" he inquired.

"Those are the names of people who entered the salon from three to five in the afternoon when the painting was ruined."

"Doors opened at what time?"

"Noon."

"Nobody present from noon to three?"

"Yes. You have the list in your hand."

Bouget grunted at Vincent's slight discrepancy.

"Judging from this there were never more than ten people present at any one time. Is that right, Vincent?"

"I should imagine that to be so, though at times the gallery was empty; sometimes only one or two people were present in the particular room where the Dunraven Girl was hung."

"No added precautions were taken due to the fact that a canvas of such extraordinary value——"

"The attendants were doubled."

"You have read the morning paper, of course?" asked Bouget.

"Yes. All of them."

"The *Courier's* account was correct, was it?"

"As correct as such things go considering the lack of information there was to go on."

"You are sure that everybody registered on entering?"

"Absolutely. Though of course I cannot guarantee that there is no forgery."

"Well, assuming there is, the fact remains that everybody who got within three feet of that canvas had left a mark of some kind or other on

the register at the entrance of the building."

"That's true," agreed Vincent.

"Then," Bouget continued meditatively, "it is just a matter of eliminating from this list. Perhaps we are fortunate," he commented laughingly, "that people in this city don't turn out for art exhibits more than they do. I had expected you to bring up the telephone book and announce that they all had viewed the painting. Ten seems a small number——" He looked up shrewdly. "Are you sure there are no more than ten, Vincent?"

Vincent hesitated.

"You see," Bouget pressed him, "the *Courier* said the picture was attracting considerable attention. It has been in the city only three days, and I'd hardly call thirty people——"

"Why—er—pardon me, old man," Vincent began, "I am afraid I must have misunderstood you. Of course there were more than ten people out there yesterday afternoon. I only brought along the names of those whom I suspected. There were others, prominent people, of course, and many of my personal friends also there. A thousand apologies, old man, for my bungling."

"But you have the names?"

"Oh, of course. I can give you some of them from memory, the others I'll get for you."

SILENTLY Bouget gave him a piece of paper and a pencil, and Vincent, with little effort, easily recalled the names of a dozen others. He scribbled them down. Many of them were names high in the social life of the city.

"The police has this list of names —the full list?" Bouget asked when Vincent passed it over to him.

"No, not the full list. The first list I gave you is in the hands of the City Prosecuting Attorney."

"But why didn't you give him all the names?"

"I hardly thought it necessary to involve everybody in a scandal of this sort."

Bouget in silence ran his eye down the list. Many of the names were familiar to him.

"Now tell me, what did you tell the prosecuting attorney that you have not told me?"

"You will notice that the first name on the list is James Davis. He is the man that I suspect. I told Egstrom, the prosecuting attorney, that."

"What is there about this man that you should suspect him?"

"He is a big brute of a man. Looks like a stevedore or ironworker, and was most decidedly out of place in an art salon. When he registered he was most obviously nervous. It struck me at the time that he must have some sinister purpose in being there."

"Did you have him watched?"

"I followed him myself from room to room."

"Every minute of the time?"

"Unfortunately, no. My attention was called elsewhere, and then——"

"Where was he when it was discovered the painting had been attacked?"

"He had disappeared."

Bouget rose.

"Well, Vincent," he said with a note of finality, "if we succeed I rather think it will be in spite of your efforts to shield your friends from publicity rather than because of the help you have given me."

The Fine Arts custodian started to protest, but Bouget cut him short.

"Please try to have the remainder of those names in my hands within an hour. That will include everybody, attendants and all."

Vincent followed him to the door. Without a word they shook hands, and Vincent left the house.

TWO hours later, Bouget might have been seen entering the editorial rooms of the *Courier*. He paused at the city desk. The city editor, at a question from Bouget, picked up a carbon copy of a story and gave it to him to read.

Bouget's lips tightened as he read it. James Davis, a truck driver and a bridegroom of only a month, had been arrested. A small atomizer half-filled with nitric acid had been found by police in the shrubbery adjoining the entrance of the Fine Arts building.

These were the only new developments. Bouget laid the story on the desk.

"Mr. Conley," he announced to the city editor, "just a tip. I wouldn't go too strong. I don't think they have the right man."

"You don't, eh?"

Bouget shook his head.

"Can you give me anything on it?" asked the editor.

"No," he answered slowly. "With your permission, I'm going upstairs to the morgue."

"You're working on it, are you?"

"Yes."

"I see. Well, thanks for the hunch." Conley was well aware of the value of this man's opinions in a case of this nature.

Bouget passed through the office and walked up a flight of steel steps in the rear of the room and brought himself to the morgue. He opened the door and found himself in a comparatively small room, with concrete floors and steel cases—a room as silent as a monastery.

In here was to be found every particle of information about everybody of consequence or inconsequence whose name had at any time appeared in the local papers; photographs of people all the way from the highest society nabob or prima donna down to the most notorious gangster who ever escaped the gallows; débutantes whose names would later figure in divorce scandals; obituaries written up to the last minute and only waiting until the subject died before they saw the full light of the streets and the details yelled from the lungs of callous newsboys.

Masses of detail more comprehensive than any criminal records. Here they reposed, neatly filed, indexed and cross-indexed, extending from the early days when the *Courier* was a four-page paper printed on a hand-press to the clippings from the late edition of the afternoon paper now being sold at the street corners.

It was here that Henri Bouget got most of his information about people that led to so many solutions of problems and mysteries upon which he had allowed his imagination to play.

At Bouget's entrance, a small, spry, middle-aged individual in carpet-slippers, came forward and eagerly took his hand. It was Homer Vane, the *Courier's* librarian, keeper of the morgue.

"Kind of e x p e c t e d you today, Henri," he said quietly but none the less cheerfully.

"Couldn't stay away, Homer," returned Bouget, digging into his inside pocket for the list of names Vincent had given him. He gave the list to the other.

"On the Dunraven case, eh? I knew they'd get you in on that. I'll see what I've got on these."

"Only those I have checked. We'll find what we want there, I believe."

"Thing is creating quite a stir over in England. Have you any clue, Henri?"

"Well, the fact is, I've got some sort of theory tucked away in the back of my head. You knew they had arrested a truck driver, didn't you?"

Homer Vane nodded. "Do you think he's guilty?"

"I don't know the man. But I am willing to wager the police arrested him at Vincent's insistence. If I

could get at the motive that leads one to commit crimes of this sort, I think we would be a long step in the right direction. I expect you, Homer, to give me that motive."

Vane, amused at this whim, looked at his friend questioningly.

"On that list you have in your hand," Bouget continued, "are twenty names. Many of them are men and women high in the social life of the city. If you will let me have all the clippings you have on them I think we will have reached some sort of conclusion. I'd like to take the stuff home with me, if I may stretch a point."

"I think we might in this instance," agreed Vane.

Bouget smiled appreciatively. "Homer, if it wasn't for you, I don't know what I would do. Come up to the house tomorrow night and bring your meerschaum. We will sit up and make a long session of it. I think this Dunraven Girl mystery will be settled by that time."

Vane accepted the invitation gladly and noiselessly slipped into one of the alcoves lined with steel filing cabinets and proceeded to gather the information that his friend required.

WITH a bundle of papers and manila envelopes tucked away in his pockets and under his arms, Henri Bouget climbed the front steps of his house. His valet and handyman, the only other occupant of the house save an aged cook, met him at the door.

"What is it, Mathews?" asked Bouget.

"A young lady, sir. She would give no name, but she insisted on seeing you."

"Where is she now?"

"In your study. She must have been waiting for an hour. I really couldn't exactly get rid of her."

Bouget passed beyond him and went into his study. At his entrance a girl of twenty-three or so, attractive but with grave anxiety marked in every line of her strained face, sprang up and nervously advanced.

"Oh, Mr. Bouget," she began, trying to restrain her eagerness, "I am so glad you came. I thought you never were coming. Won't you please help me?"

"I shall be only too glad to do what I can. But please sit down and—well, suppose you tell me who you are?"

The girl eased herself down onto the edge of a straight chair.

"I am Mrs. James Davis——"

"Your husband drives a truck?"

"Yes, for the Cudahy Construction Company."

"How long have you been married?"

"But, you don't think that he did it—you don't think——?"

"I don't think anything, Mrs. Davis," Bouget returned dryly. "Suppose you tell me what I want to know."

The girl didn't quite know what to make of that. Bouget repeated his question: "How long did you say you have been married?"

"Six weeks next Monday."

"Your husband a great lover of art, is he?"

The girl, none too sure what sinister implication lay back of the question, hesitated.

"Come, don't be afraid to answer," Bouget encouraged her.

"No, he isn't."

"Then, how does it happen that he took an afternoon off to visit an art gallery?"

"He didn't take the afternoon off—and I can prove it. He was delivering a load of gravel in the neighborhood and—dropped in."

"H'm!"

"Oh, don't you believe me?" she pleaded with anguish in her voice.

"Indeed I do. But I am thinking how odd it would sound in court when

he says he doesn't know a thing and probably doesn't care a hang about art, but dropped in at the exhibit for the first time in his life at the very moment when the most celebrated canvas in America was deliberately and fiendishly destroyed. Can't you explain *why* he went there?"

"Well, if you must know why he was there — it was because I sent him!"

Bouget showed no sign of surprise. On the contrary he remarked:

"Thank you, I wanted you to say something of the sort. From your own tasteful appearance, I should judge that you admire beautiful things—paintings, music, good books. Am I correct?"

The girl nodded, almost as if she regretted the admission.

"And I surmise that once or twice, when the novelty of the honeymoon had worn off, you might have held this up to him — suggested that he 'get culture,' as it were."

"I told him to go and see the painting that everybody was raving about."

"Exactly."

"Then can't you have him freed? You know he didn't do it."

"I'm afraid I haven't the power to do that. But at least I can say they had little hope of convincing him on such flimsy evidence. You see, there were others present, and they would have to convict them all if that is all they have against your husband. By the way, that atomizer they discovered in the shrubbery—wasn't yours, of course?"

"No, sir. I should say not."

"You have seen the Dunraven Girl, have you?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Very beautiful, is it?"

"It sure is!"

"What do you think of the person who deliberately would ruin it—spray it with acid knowing it could never be replaced?"

The girl's eyes flashed. "I would think him the vilest sort of fiend—a murderer—just as though somebody had murdered a small girl."

"And I am inclined to think that is just what that person is—a murderer." Bouget rose. "I don't think you have any cause to worry, Mrs. Davis."

The girl, much relieved, stood up and took Bouget's outstretched hand. At the front door, Bouget added: "I would suggest that you appear at the preliminary hearing tomorrow at the city hall."

"Indeed I shall. Will you be there?"

"I shall try to be."

Bouget closed the door behind her.

"Mathews!" he called.

"Yes, sir."

"Under no circumstances am I to be disturbed tonight."

"Very well, sir."

BOUGET went into his study, exchanged his street coat for a shabby smoking jacket with holes burnt through the pockets, and prepared to sit his way through the night, or until such time as he had reached some sort of tenable solution to the Dunraven Girl mystery.

He spread the clippings from the *Courier* morgue all over the top of his huge desk, arranging them as methodically as a player would set out a hand in solitaire. This done, he filled his blackened curved, stem pipe, lit it and packed the lighted tobacco down into the bowl with his thumb, keeping his eye at the same time on the assortment of facts that covered his desk. Then he stood, one elbow on the desk, hunched over it, blowing out thick clouds of white smoke into the stuffy room.

For hours, never varying his position, he kept at his work, weighing

and testing facts, seeking for motives—motives, always motives.

And when he couldn't make them hold up, he reverted to what he knew of abnormal psychology and tried to hunt down unconscious motives; those little passions, that made people act unreasonably, even against their better judgment, following the dictates of an inner consciousness that they themselves were unable to explain or justify. It was in this field that Bouget was pre-eminent.

He was always more than willing to give the police all the clues they wanted. Let them trace for finger prints, for death notes in disguised handwritings, for empty shells from discarded revolvers—yes, atomizers if they wished—and he, even with this apparent handicap, would beat them all to the post.

It all devolved around his theory that was getting to be famous: unless you understand the individual you cannot understand society and its diseases. A mystery of this sort was nothing more than a raw slice from life, abnormal enough to call into play all one's theories gathered in saner periods of observation. It was the abnormal case that tested the normal rule.

Bouget possessed the supreme gift of concentration. He was able to lose himself completely from his surroundings, submerge himself entirely in his subject.

As his pipe burned itself out, he mechanically reached for his large brass humidor and lit up again as though he was unaware of what he was doing. And so the night dragged on.

Suddenly his lips tightened. He was fingering a clipping that anyone might well have wondered how it came to be on his desk. It interested him immensely. It gave him something he had been hoping for—a new light, a different point of view on a problem that was threatening to engulf him. He held it meditatively in his hand and wondered how he had been foolish enough to let its significance escape him until that moment.

He straightened, and, vaguely noting it was already three o'clock, dropped into his Morris-chair with the clipping in his hand.

It was short, but sufficiently interesting for the *Courier* to have placed it in a box on page one at the time of the Berkeley fire when half of the city was razed.

It was to the effect that Mrs. Florence Devinnes, a woman well known in society circles but who now practically lived in retirement since her rather sensational divorce, had fought her way back into her burning house and, ignoring all her valuables, saved her canary. Then, she had returned to the street, and again fighting her way through the fire lines had reentered the house to return with a Persian kitten in her arms.

But this was not all. While the crowds stood gazing in horror at her mad insistence, she once more dashed into the house, emerging as the roof collapsed with a second bird cage that was empty.

It was a simple, dramatic story of a woman's devotion to her pets.

What significance Bouget saw in this would be hard to state. He finished reading it and, with arms thrown back, sank contentedly into the recesses of his chair. An amused expression came over his face.

Presently he reached for the bundle of clippings that dealt with the unsavory details of Mrs. Devinnes's divorce. It had attracted considerable attention at the time, as most society divorces do. But this had more than that quality of prominence to recommend it to city editors.

There was one feature about the Devinnes divorce that struck the note of the unusual: Mrs. Devinnes had

point-blank refused the custody of her four-year-old boy. Her husband had insisted that he would not separate the youngster from the mother, but Mrs. Devinnes was not to be moved.

She didn't want the boy, and that was all there was to it.

Even the argument that the little fellow would fill the void in her heart after her husband left did not sway her. Withal she implied no guilt, no aspersions on the child's birth.

Over a new pipe, Bouget read the clippings and tried to see what was behind them; tried to analyze this woman's mind and emotions; a woman he had never met, had never even heard of before Edward Vincent had reluctantly scribbled her name with several others on a slip of paper.

What connection had she with the mutilation of this great painting?

IT was eight o'clock and the room was dense with tobacco fumes when Bouget suddenly aroused himself from the comfortable depths of his chair. Totally at variance with his seemingly indolent manner of the night, Bouget sprang up. It was clear he had reached a decision. He hastily cleared his desk of the newspaper clippings and put them into their manila envelopes. Then he sat down and wrote a brief note to the city editor of the *Courier;* after which he called Mathews.

"Mathews," he said, "after I have gone out, take these envelopes of clippings down to the *Courier* and give them personally to Mr. Vane. Then ask to see the city editor, Mr. Conley, and give him this note, but be careful not to give it to anybody but Conley."

"Very well, sir."

"Then, while I am cleaning up, have Alice make me some hot coffee and something to eat. I'm starving."

MRS. FLORENCE DEVINNES was in the garden at the rear of her old-fashioned gabled house picking violets when her maid came out and handed her a card. Mrs. Devinnes slipped off one of her soiled cotton gloves and took the card. Her face turned white.

"Shall I say you are not home, ma'am?" The maid was solicitous.

Her mistress hesitated for a moment.

"No—I suppose I had better see him. Tell Mr. Bouget I will be right in."

The maid left and Mrs. Devinnes sank, rather than sat, down on a garden bench.

In the meantime Henri Bouget, a different man in mood and in appearance than when he was wrestling with his problem through the long hours of the night, strolled around Mrs. Devinnes's room, peering through windows, into cages, and tried to keep at an agreeable distance two growling drawing-room spaniels.

He heard footsteps and saw Mrs. Devinnes, an appealingly attractive woman of five and thirty, advancing toward him. He noticed that she extended her whole arm almost at shoulder height when she came forward to shake hands with him.

As he held her hand, rather impolitely he scrutinized her fingers, but only for the smallest fraction of a minute.

"Acid burns!" he said in a low, distinct voice.

"Yes," she answered, "I was—cleaning—my gloves."

"Surely not in nitric acid, Mrs. Devinnes?" He watched her closely.

Instantly all the color left her face.

"I want you to tell me why you did it, Mrs. Devinnes."

"How did you know?" she asked faintly.

"When I saw the method in which you shook hands with me I was further convinced that you were not incapable of doing things on—let us say—impulse."

He drew up a chair for her and placed her in it. Then, closing the door, he took his place close before her.

They were closeted for fully an hour, talking in low murmurs. At the end of that time, Bouget rose and, going to the door, called the maid. He sent her upstairs for her mistress' hat and coat. Then, going over to the telephone, he called up the prosecuting attorney.

"You will be in court at eleven, will you?" he was asking. "Very well. At eleven-fifteen"—he glanced at his watch—"at eleven-fifteen I shall walk into the courtroom. I will have with me the one who is guilty of destroying the Dunraven Girl."

He hung up the receiver.

SHORTLY after, Henri Bouget, accompanied by Mrs. Florence Devinnes, left the latter's house for the city hall.

Court was in session. The bride of James Davis was on the witness stand. Prosecuting Attorney Egstrom was grilling her unmercifully. The door at the rear of the crowded court opened. Egstrom looked up, and in the middle of asking a question broke off and stared across the room. The eyes of the crowd followed his gaze.

They saw a neatly dressed man advancing to the rail supporting on his arm the once society idol, Mrs. Florence Devinnes. They did not know what her presence meant there. Mrs. Devinnes paid no attention to the crowd. She didn't appear to have noticed that she had stopped the proceedings.

Still she continued to advance on Bouget's arm.

At a nod from Bouget, a bailiff stepped forward and opened the gate of the enclosure that kept out all save attorneys, witnesses and newspaper reporters. The two passed through. Directly under the high desk of the judge, she halted.

"Your Honor," she announced in an amazingly placid voice, as though she were giving her maid instructions on her household duties, "I can clear up this case. I am the one who is guilty! I sprayed nitric acid on the picture known as the Dunraven Girl!"

An audible gasp of surprise was exhaled from the packed crowd. Then there was silence. It was broken when the prosecuting attorney walked over to Bouget. The latter looked into the face of Egstrom, nodded and said:

"What Mrs. Devinnes said is correct."

TRUE to his appointment that evening, Homer Vane brought along his well-browned meerschaum and lit up in Bouget's study.

He sighed contentedly as he dropped into a comfortable chair and stretched out his thin legs. Until this moment he had refrained from saying a word. Now from the depths of comfort he queried languidly, raising his eyebrows rather than his voice to indicate the question:

"Well—I suppose congratulations are in order?"

"Thanks," returned his friend from behind a rising blanket of thick smoke.

"Will it be asking too much if I should happen to inquire how it was done?" Vane tamped the glowing tobacco down.

Bouget chuckled deeply, and tossed a spent match into the fireplace before he replied:

"It was comparatively simple, old man, thanks to your help and the *Courier's* morgue. But to Mrs. James Davis, bride of the wrongly accused man, I owe a great deal. She gave me quite an idea. She denounced the criminal—as I prefer to call a despoiler of valuable art works—as a murderer of children."

Vane straightened.

"Murderer?"

"Yes. She probably meant it figuratively. I took it quite literally. I admit I was rather hopelessly stumped until she gave me that hint. And even at the time I didn't realize its value. That put things in quite another light. The person had not ruined a painting—but had injured, maimed or murdered a beautiful girl. And that gave me an inkling of the motive.

"Now my problem was to find a person capable of great cruelty. So, with this idea in mind, I went over your clippings. I found little of any considerable value; or rather found only the average mess of scandal. Then, as I was about to give up, I ran across a clipping that had escaped me before. It told of Mrs. Devinnes's stout attempts to rescue her animal pets at the risk of her own disfigurement, even at the risk of her life. And there you are!"

Vane looked for him to continue.

"But the connection—pets and murdering children hardly go hand in hand," he protested.

"Oh, I don't know. But I will say this: a morbid love of animals that I read in the actions of this woman very often hides a lust for cruelty. It sounds unreasonable, perhaps, but it is true that many animal lovers detest human beings. They revel in the very helplessness of their pets—like to see them depending upon their owners. It is a psychological fact."

Bouget paused, going over in his mind the train of reasoning of the preceding evening.

"But even that," he continued quietly, "didn't solve my problem. It interested me greatly in Mrs. Devinnes. It explained many things to me about her that had the public guessing at her divorce hearing. You remember the case?"

"Only vaguely."

"If you did you would recall that she positively refused, even at the insistence of the court, the custody of her small boy. She felt no affection for him. I'll try to explain why in a moment. Having gone this far, I decided I would call upon the lady and see what I could learn. I called this morning.

"She was in the garden when the maid presented my card. Upon sight of my name, she turned white and sank upon a bench to support herself. I saw everything through the window looking upon the rear of the house. She could have refused to see me—and—well, I don't know what might have happened, for I didn't want her at the mercy of Egstrom's grilling.

"However, she did what nine out of ten people in such a situation would have done—she assumed that I knew more than I actually did. So if ever you go to arrest a man, Homer, remember that."

Vane chuckled.

"However, she consented to see me. When she advanced to shake hands with me, I particularly noticed one thing—she extended her whole arm, shoulder high, at me as she advanced from the far side of the room. While I wouldn't have you believe that is an infallible, totally conclusive sign of insanity, it is a fair indication that that person is something of a neurotic. At all events it was in my favor. Then, with her hand in mine, I told her quietly that she had an acid burn on her finger. Instead of contradicting me, she fell into the trap by making up a trumpery excuse. And then I knew I had her. There was absolutely not a blemish on either hand!"

"Phew!" Vane gave vent to a whistle. "Go on."

"There isn't much more to tell. That simple trap she fell into shook what little assurance she had left. Then I closed the door and we had quite an interesting talk.'"

He stopped, relit his pipe, and seemed reluctant to say anything further.

BUT the main point? You haven't told me why——" began Vane, leaning forward and speaking quietly.

Bouget grinned appreciatively.

"That ends the 'how'. Very well, here's the 'why' of it. It dates back considerably. But it is sufficient to know only this: Mrs. Florence Devinnes was obsessed with one idea. It always lurked, perhaps we can say in generations of Stewarts — her maiden name—in the back of the Stewart mind, long before Florence Stewart was ever dreamed of. One idea—one obsession, lurking in the subconscious, under-strata of her mind: her marital happiness would be wrecked unless she had a girl baby.

"There had been unpleasantness in the Stewart family before; there would be again. One of those anomalies hard to explain, but real nevertheless. You will find a strain of the 'unusual' running back in almost everybody. Perhaps it is some fear that our grandfathers had repressed, showing itself in some odd twist, some complexion of thought in ourselves. But there it is.

"Mrs. Devinnes had this obsession in the back of her mind. When the boy, Edward, was born she was told it would be impossible for her ever to bear another child. The knowledge practically mentally unbalanced her. She was absolutely incapable, under these circumstances, of loving her son. Had he been a girl—well, the Dunraven Girl would still be an object of beauty and a foreign public would not be at our throats today."

"But still, the connection?" Vane demanded.

"She didn't hate her son—she just ignored his existence. Then she heard that the whole city was in love with this celebrated work of art, and she went to see it. When you and I viewed the painting we fell in love with the Dunraven Girl. When Mrs. Devinnes viewed it, she saw symbolized the wreck of her own love, ambition and glory of motherhood. Instead of turning against the boy whose existence she refused to admit, she turned her fury on the girl whom she saw in the work of art. She returned the following day—and you know with what tragic result."

He paused. Vane had nothing to say.

"You know, Homer," Bouget added with a sigh, "the dividing line between a woman's love and her hate is as thin as a thread of gossamer. Perhaps it ceases to exist in the tensity of a great surge of emotion. Perhaps Mrs. Devinnes loved that Dunraven Girl as her own unborn baby girl—"

"Come, old man, you are getting out of your element if you try to excuse a deed of that sort," interposed Vane.

"Very well, then, let us say this: Thus can the domestic troubles of one frail woman create international indignation!"

Lammarto's Door

By CHARLES B. STILSON

DETECTIVE - CAPTAIN KEYES put it squarely up to Dan Tully. For the first time in his long career, Dan's job depended on his intellect, which was hard.

"Clean up this case," the captain said, "or——" And Tully saw no case.

In the detectives' room he voiced bitter protest.

"Just a plain, rotten bum!" Dan rapped his knuckles on the long table. "He falls an' busts his bean on the curb, an' Cap makes a case outta it! I tell you, fellers, Cap's new-fangled notions are ruinin' the force! If it wasn't for the old woman an' kids——" With one hand Tully pulled at his stubby black mustache. The other fingered on his suspender the badge that the captain's modernism threatened.

Later, in a room back of Appleton's bar in Pine Street, Dan aired his grievance to Ross Allen, five-foot-three police reporter for *The Herald*.

"Tully," interrupted Allen, "how many times have I asked some of you fellows for the real insides of a case? Not for the paper, but just to see if I couldn't help. If the good Lord had made me or the Civil Service regulations different, I'd have been a detective. Now you're in dutch with the Cap; he thinks you're a has-been. Come across with the dope, and let me see if I can't help you."

Big black Dan stared across the table at pale little Allen.

"There's nothin' to it, I tell you," he rumbled. "It's only Cap's way of gittin' me badge."

"Come across."

Tully grunted, and yielded.

Jimmie Bo was the name the dead man had been known by. He was a derelict, a hanger-on of saloons. A patrolman had found him dying in Summer Street at two o'clock in the morning three days before. The coroner's physician had disagreed with the police, and had pointed out that the location of his injury was such that he could not have come by it in a mere fall against the curb. The detective captain had agreed with the doctor. Then he had "picked on" Tully.

"Says he was croaked—an' whoinell would croak him, an' why?" demanded Dan in derision. "The poor stew never had two-bits in his jeans, an' was harmless as a rabbit. Doc Walle is a nut, an' now me badge——"

"Been to the morgue?"

"What's th' use?"

"Come on."

WRAPPED in his coarse sheet on a hard couch, Jimmie Bo offered nothing in explanation of his coming thither. He was a smallish, slender man with a withered, bony face, a straggling gray mustache, a chin-tuft, and a quantity of grizzled hair.

"Looks French," commented Allen.

"Sure, he was," said Tully. "Sometimes they called him Frenchy."

Thompson, the morgue attendant, emptied a canvas sack of the dead

man's belongings: his worn garments, a gardener's trowel, a length of cord, a lump of sticky wax, a cheap fountain pen, a book of postage-stamps, and a carefully wrapped packet of envelopes and stationery of the finest texture.

"Hell!" ejaculated Tully, fingering the collection with awakening interest, "that's a funny mess to come outta a bum's pockets."

Doctor Walle was not about, which was just as well. Corner Jim Kleinhans greeted the investigators pleasantly in his office.

"So you're workin' this case?" he asked, chewing the cigar Allen had tendered, and winking over his head at Tully.

"Keep it under your hat, Jim," pleaded Allen. "Don't give me away to the boys."

"All right, son—mum as a lamppost. You might turn out to be a reg'lar Herlock Sholmes, after all. The Lord sometimes does brains up in mighty small pill-boxes."

From Kleinhans the man-hunters learned that Jimmie Bo had died of a fractured skull, caused by the blow of a blunt instrument, which had left a depression four inches in diameter at the top of his head.

"So you see he couldn't have hit himself on the curb."

Tully snorted.

"Was he soused?" asked Allen.

"To the eyebrows."

Patrolman Michael Cluney had found the dying man.

"Let's go see him," said Allen.

"He knows nothin' about it. I've talked with him," objected big Dan, but Allen insisted.

Cluney, of the "owl" platoon, was found on his beat.

"Phwat do Oi know about him? Why, Oi know all about him," was the patrolman's grandiloquent declaration, and he traced cabalistic symbols in the air with his nightstick.

"But what?" Allen was the questioner.

"Well—why, he was wan av th' champeen souses av th' wor-rld. He'd been run in fer ut a hoonderd toimes. An'—thot's all."

"How was he lying when you found him?"

"On th' flat av his back, wid his fate over th' cur-rub an' his head an' shoulthers in th' gutter."

"Did he say anything?"

"No—yis—lemme see. Yis, he *did* say a wurrud or so whin Oi sthirred him. Phwat was ut now?"

Cluney wrinkled his forehead.

"Oi have ut! He mumbled somethin' about Lammarto's door, an' thin some more thot Oi didn't undhersthand an' cannot raymimber—ye know he was a Frincher."

"Lammarto! Who's Lammarto?"

"Doomed if Oi know—some dago belike. His place, phwatever he is, is not on my bate."

This was something. At the nearest drugstore Allen went through all the L's in the City Directory, but found no Lammarto.

"You're workin' like a detective, kid," admired Tully. Allen's "Thanks" floated over his head.

Tim Dougherty, who conducted a "soft-drink" bar, without any apologies to anyone, contributed the information that Jimmie Bo had often been seen writing letters in his place, and the epistles were French, for Tim had failed in an attempt to read them over Jimmie's shoulder.

"Jimmie an' Joe Mauro"—Tim mentioned another character well known to the police—"used to get lighted up together. Y'see, though Joe's an Italian he can spiel the French lingo, an' when Jimmie was soused he liked to reel it."

"Where's Joe?" cut in Tully, and his eyes narrowed when Dougher-

ty's "bartender" spoke up to say that Joe and Jimmy Bo had left the place at closing-time on Tuesday night, and he had seen neither of them since. "They were both soused up," added the "bartender," then added hastily: "But they didn't get it here."

Tully began to see a path that even his square-toed feet could follow. It had been on Tuesday night —more correctly, Wednesday morning—that Jimmie Bo had been found in Summer Street.

Allen mentioned the trowel.

"Sure, I know about that!" offered Dougherty, astonished at this magnifying of trifles. "Jimmie worked at gardening sometimes for an old dame named Harris, out near the end of Summer Street. That's how he used to earn the money that I kept for him sometimes. Wonder what he done with it—never seen him spend a cent."

Joe Mauro had "croaked" Jimmie Bo—jubilantly Tully declared it—and it remained only to pinch Mauro.

As big Dan's spirits rose, Allen's fell, and for the same reason. It looked like a plain case—and a sordid one — and Allen had hoped for a mystery and a romance.

IT was nearly noon. Allen was due at *The Herald* editorial rooms at two o'clock. In the interim he left Tully and went alone to see Mrs. Harris.

Yes, she told him, Mr. Bo had worked in her extensive gardens and greenhouses. He had been an expert in the care of orchids, and furthermore he had been a kind and courteous gentleman in his dealings with her, "with only the one unfortunate habit, which undoubtedly had been responsible for his death, poor man!" Mrs. Harris squeezed a tear into a bit of lace, and faintly shrieked "My gracious!" when Allen hinted at foul play. Behind her thick-lensed spectacles her eyes looked large as eggs.

Mr. Bo had slept in a room partitioned off at the end of one of the greenhouses. He had been helping Mr. McRae, the regular gardener, for nearly five years, and Mrs. Harris had trusted him. Mr. Allen was welcome to examine that room.

Allen found three cigar-boxes full of letters under a cot-bed in the greenhouse-room. They were written in French, apparently by one person. The envelopes bore French stamps. They were addressed in a girlish hand to "Monsieur Jacques de Beauvois, Poste Restante, Orchester, N. Y., Etats-Unis." With Mrs. Harris's permission, Allen took the letters with him.

On his way downtown the amateur Pinkerton walked slowly through the block in lower Summer Street where Jimmie Bo had received his death-wound.

It was an old section of the city. On Allen's right, at the corner of Amherst Avenue, was a grocery, then a tailor-shop, and beyond that a quaint second-hand book store, whose floor was three steps down from the sidewalk, and whose swinging sign-board and windows, piled with curios, and ancient volumes, called to mind one of Dickens's London shops. A tenement adjoined the book store, then came an alley, a dilapidated building reputed to have been a station in the Underground Railway of pre-Rebellion days, now occupied by a cobbler, and on the corner of Fitzmore Street, a dwelling-house of faded brick.

On the right at Amherst Street was a tall apartment-house with a rear court and alley; a low stone building used for storage, a two-storied brick structure occupied

by a goldbeater's establishment, a blacksmith shop, a garden and the house to which it appertained, a large oldtime residence, now tenanted as an office building by a number of physicians.

Precisely in front of the goldbeater's shop Jimmie Bo had been found; but nowhere did Allen see a name on sign or door or window that even faintly resembled Lammarto. He made inquiries along the street. Lammarto appeared to be a myth.

"Just an ordinary cheap murder case, after all," Allen discontentedly muttered; "though there may be something in the letters." He thought of a French taxidermist in State Street who might translate them for him.

At Headquarters that evening he again saw Tully, who led him with mystery into a corner.

"Mauro done it all right. He's blew town. We'll get him, though. He don't know he's wanted, an' the dragnet's out."

"Careful, Dan," cautioned Allen. "We've not a scrap of real evidence, and his kind usually know how to hold their tongues."

"This one will talk," declared Tully with conviction. "It's my badge if he don't. Watch me."

Monsieur Achille Perigord looked up from the white Angora cat that he was artfully mounting as an overhead bell announced that someone had entered his shop. Three hounds leaped up, thrust mottled snouts over the edge of the counter, and bayed. Time had deadened M. Perigord's ears so that he could no longer hear the opening of his door; sometimes he did not hear the warning bell; but between bell and dogs he knew when he had callers.

"Silence!" he commanded the hounds, and they obeyed him. He arose from his workbench, pushed silver-rimmed spectacles up on his high forehead, and advanced to the counter, peering at the visitor from watery gray eyes and cupping a hand at his ear.

Had it been possible for Jimmie Bo to have left his new grave in the Potters Field and come to stand behind M. Perigord's counter, Allen could have sworn that he had done it, so like was the living to the dead face he had seen at the morgue.

"In what may I serve *m'sieu?*" inquired M. Perigord, in singularly lifeless tones. "Ees eet zat he have, pairhaps, somet'eeng to be mount'?" He nodded to the packet under Allen's elbow.

"No!" Allen almost shouted. "It's some letters—letters from France. I want you to read them for me. I will pay you."

"Lettairs?" repeated the old man, hardly above a whisper. "Lettairs, *m'sieu*—an' from France?" He removed the hand from his ear, and with it stroked his gray imperial. His fingers trembled.

"But, yes, I will read your lettairs, *m'sieu*, an' zere s'all be nozzing to pay — *rien du tout* — for, *m'sieu*, I have not see one single lettair from *la belle* France in twenty years. *Non.*"

Allen unwrapped the packet.

"So many!" M. Perigord looked apprehensively at the stack of letters and then at the partly stuffed cat. "I am ver' sorree, *m'sieu*, but I cannot for *m'sieu* to read his so many lettairs all at ze present. My work, he hurree me some zis morning."

Allen explained that he was in no hurry; he would leave the letters and return for them the next day. Inspiration laid a hand on the little newspaper man's shoulder then, though he did not at the instant recognize the touch.

"Does 'Lammarto's door,' or

something like that, mean anything in French?" he asked.

"Will *m'sieu* have ze goodness to repeat?" M. Perigord's hand was at his ear, his face perplexed.

"Lammarto's door!" bawled Allen, rising on tiptoes. "Lam-mar-to's door!"

M. Perigord thought for a moment, and a light came into his faded eyes.

"Ees eet pairhaps zat *m'sieu* mean to say *"le marteau d'or?"* he inquired; and, in pronouncing the words of French his voice was no longer dull and toneless, but full and sonorous.

That might be it, thought Allen, and inquired the meaning of the words.

"Eet mean 'ze hammair of gold,' *m'sieu.*"

"A golden hammer?"

"*Mais oui*—but yes, *m'sieu.*"

FROM M. Perigord's shop Allen went to the Post Office.

Yes, a clerk at the money-order window told him, a man who signed himself Jacques de Beauvois had sent many small sums of money to France. Allen asked to whom.

"That," replied the clerk, with smiling regret, "I cannot tell you unless you get a court order."

At Appleton's, where he had agreed to meet Tully at 11 o'clock, no Tully appeared, but he had left a note.

For once his faith in the "dragnet" had been justified; Giuseppe Mauro had been arrested in Buffalo, and Tully had gone to get him.

Hardly had Allen reported at the newspaper in the afternoon when Tully telephoned.

"You was dead right, kid, this Eyetalian's a tight one." The detective's tones were worried. "All the way down in the train an' for two hours at Headquarters I done my possible to make him come clean, an' d'you s'pose he'd loosen? Pretends he can't spiel English, which is a damn lie. Coroner's called the Bo inquest for three o'clock at the morgue. I'm takin' my witnesses, an' I'm hopin' Mauro'll weaken when he sees the machinery runnin'. You'd better come over."

"Mr. Morris, this Bo story may break into a murder," reported Allen at the city editor's desk.

" 'At so?"

Morris let his pencil fall, dived into a desk drawer, and with the energy of a terrier at a woodchuck hole began digging and tossing photographs.

"There!" He flung out an eight-by-twelve print. "There's a photo of Summer Street, about where this thing must have been pulled off. Put a pencil mark on it, so I can have the art department make an 'X' to show where the body was found. If you got a murder, we'll run a cut."

The picture had been taken midway between Fitzmore Street and Amherst Avenue. In the left foreground was the quaint bookshop with its swinging wooden signboard, and at the right was the front of the goldbeater's place. Allen, bending to make the requested mark, started and drew a quick breath.

"When was that taken?" he demanded.

"Last Saturday. That's part of the Orphans' Day parade going through Amherst Avenue. Lucky to have it all ready, ain't we?" Morris had failed to notice his reporter's excitement.

Allen glanced at the office clock, dabbed a hasty mark on the photo, and sprinted for the door.

"There's something in that photo that ain't there now," he flung back in answer to Morris's shouted query. "I got to hustle."

When the clock on the wall of the inquest chamber at the City morgue struck three, Coroner Kleinhans and Detective Tully began to assemble the "machinery." The coroner seated himself at the desk on the platform at the upper end of the room and laid his notebook before him. At a lower table the official stenographer arranged pads and pens.

On the foremost bench, handcuffed and sullenly defiant, was Giuseppe Mauro, a sturdy, swarthy rogue with a sweeping mustache blacker than Tully's own.

As yet no charge more serious than vagrancy had been made against Mauro; but Tully sat beside him, ready to charge him with murder in the first degree, if the chance should offer. Mauro knew it, and though outwardly indifferent, he was very watchful. At his other elbow sat the interpreter, on whose presence he had insisted.

Tully was acutely aware that somewhere among the spectators was the hawk's face of Detective-Captain Stanley Keyes, and Dan's mouth was grim. On what he could now "show" did his badge depend. He, too, had looked for Lammarto, and found him not. His witnesses were Cluney and Dougherty, with sundry of the latter's hangers-on.

Coroner Kleinhans had rapped for order and cleared his throat when an attendant thrust his head through the doorway to say Tully was wanted at the telephone. Unwilling to go on with Tully absent, the coroner waited. Presently Dan's head appeared around the doorjamb.

"Say, Jim—I mean, please, your honor—can you wait ten minutes? I got new evidence, an' I wanta go git it."

The coroner consented.

In something less than the stipulated time the waiters heard a high-powered motorcar choke and snort in front of the morgue. Heavy feet tramped the corridor, and Tully marched in, bent and perspiring under the weight of an object which caused the hitherto mildly interested spectators to crane in their seats.

Giuseppe Mauro looked, half rose from his seat, and slumped back with a clank of shackles and a Neapolitan curse.

Tully bore a broad, shield-shaped plaque of wood three inches thick and at least four feet high, from the centre of which projected a giant carved arm, doubled in the act of striking, and clutching in its great fingers a massive, short-handled hammer.

Captain Keyes and Doctor Walle remembered their classics, and recognized in the effigy the arm and hammer of Vulcan. The emblem and shield were heavily coated with a flashing, shimmering layer of gold-leaf.

With a bang Tully set his burden down, snatched off his derby, and mopped his forehead with his sleeve. Two men who had come in behind him paused near the door. One of them was little Allen.

"For the luvva Mike, Dan, what is that?" asked the coroner, curiosity submerging his magisterial aplomb.

"It's the case," proudly and succinctly Tully replied. "Will you please call me to the stand?"

"Daniel Tully!!" promptly called the coroner. "Now, Dan, fire away."

Tully's eyes sought those of his captain. "To clear this case, we gotta pass up a charge of attempted burglary," he said. "Will you do it?"

"Go ahead," answered the mystified captain.

"Well, it's like this: Joe Mauro here didn't kill Jimmie Bo. He only coaxed him to help him in a bur-

glary—which Jimmie wouldn't have done, only he was too soused to tell a robbery from a clambake. I'm goin' to tell what happened as near as I can dope it, an' if Mauro says yes—why, that's all.

"This here"—Tully pointed to the piece with which he had set his stage—"is the sign off the front of T. Speed's goldbeater's shop in Summer Street. Mauro thought there might be some loose gold layin' around, an' he seen a front window open in the upper story last Tuesday night. He gits this here Jimmie Bo to climb up on his back. Jimmie gits holt of this sign to hang onto. It had been up a long time, an' the rain had rusted the spikes. When he pulled on it, they broke, an' over it come, hittin' him a helluva — excuse me, your honor — a wallop on the bean."

"Jimmie an' the sign comes down smash on the sidewalk. Joe here don't know how hard Jimmie is hit, but he knows the sign is damagin' evidence. He grabs it up an' hides it back of the ash-barrels behind the Arundel Apartments, an' then he beats it outta town to Buffalo.

"Ask him if that ain't straight," Tully directed the interpreter; but Mauro decided to dispense with his mouthpiece. He stood up and grinned.

"How yo' fin' heem out, I dunno, Meest' Tullee, but eet happen all lika yo' say."

On his way out Captain Keyes paused by Tully, who was unlocking Mauro's handcuffs.

"Good work, Dan—and I won't ask any embarrassing questions."

Big Dan flushed, and the captain went on with a smile, which broadened when he saw little Allen move hastily out of his way.

When Keyes had gone, the man who had come in with Allen advanced to the coroner's desk. A curious appearance was lent to his face by the flash and glitter of innumerable flecks of yellow metal that clung to his cheeks and chin. Similar particles adhered to the coroner's fingers after they had shaken hands.

"I suppose I can have my sign now," he said, "unless you are going to lock it up for murder."

Next morning Allen went to the taxidermist's for Jimmie Bo's letters.

"Ah, you come, *m'sieu!*" M. Perigord greeted him with eagerness. "I have read ze lettairs. Tell me queeck, *m'sieu*, where ees zis Monsieur Jacques de Beauvois."

"He's dead," Allan answered—"killed by the golden hammer," and he told the story to M. Perigord. At its conclusion, he was astonished to see the old man in tears.

"Ah, you don' on'erstan', *m'sieu*," he said. "Zis Monsieur de Beauvois was a good an' great man. But he have one terrible habit. Eet ruin heem. So he come to America an' leave his leetle daughter in a convent—ze lettairs are from ze daughter, *m'sieu*. Now she ees grow oop an' soon to be marry. All through ze years zey have write each ozzer, an' M. de Beauvois have always tell her how well he do in America, an' he have earn money, w'ich he have sen' her. Now he ees dead. *Le marteau d'or* have strike heem. Zere will be no more lettairs, but one, w'ich I s'all write—an' in w'ich I s'all tell Mademoiselle de Beauvois a good lie about her fazhair, w'ich *le bon Dieu* surely will forgeeve.

"An' you, *m'sieu*" — M. Perigord looked appealingly at Allen—"you an' me, we will keep eet a leetle secret between us, ees eet not?—for ze honor of a French gentleman who have lose ze fight."

It was not good newspaper work, but Allen promised.

Limpy Plays Mr. Hyde

By HERBERT ASBURY

LIMPY MALONE stood for a moment on the small dock, naked to the waist, his hands bleeding, the pelting rain beating him until his back burned and stung with the pain.

But the prison was behind him, and so far he was safe.

He was certain the guards had not seen him, for they had not rushed from their cages atop the masonry to fire at him. Their eyes had not been able to pierce the blinding sheets of rain, and the wind had thrown too many shadows on the walls and buildings for them to pay any attention to Limpy's dim figure as he slid from the roof of his cell block down the swaying strand of wire, his hands wrapped in his shirt.

Lowering himself carefully into the Hudson from the stringpiece of the little pier, Limpy struck out and swam slowly and silently, keeping under water as much as possible. He swam two hundred feet and more before he cleared the south wall and caught a glimpse of the piano factory just below the prison.

It was hard work, but finally he clambered onto the bank of the river not fifty feet from the dark shadows that he knew were the factory buildings. He lay in the mud, silent, until he was sure that the night watchman had not heard him, and then he went carefully up the embankment and down the railroad tracks, cutting through to the main highway after he had got safely past the clump of buildings.

Limpy ran at the top of his poor speed after he had gained the road, but he soon tired, and it was not long before he was staggering along in a plodding shamble, head down against the gale and the stinging rain that beat viciously against the bare skin of his upper body and wrapped his voluminous prison trousers in a sodden mass about his legs.

He was barely moving when a flash of lightning forked through the darkness and showed him a hedge to his right. It offered shelter, and he clambered over it and lay panting like a spent dog. With the next flash he saw dimly the shadowy outline of a house, two hundred feet or so from the hedge, with a garden patch between.

This was the house in which old Clubfoot Joe lived. It was of stone and very old, and it had but two rooms. It sprawled in dingy squalor in the midst of a small clump of poplars a hundred feet from the swirling waters of the river. For many years old Joe had been its only occupant. He was old and mean, and he would have little intercourse with his neighbors, so that they knew nothing of him except that he cultivated a small garden

and, occasionally, hauled his produce to the railroad station in a small handcart.

It was only for a little while that Limpy lay under the hedge. When he had recovered some of his strength, he crawled along the line of stunted bushes, and then across the garden patch, through the wet, clinging mud.

There was no light in the house, and no sound came from it. There were no human sounds anywhere as Limpy raised himself and peered over the window-sill, trying to see through the glass into the darkened room.

He could hear nothing but the rattle of the rain, the whipping whine of the wind and, far down the river, the hoarse bellowing of a foghorn as a belated steamer labored against the storm. It was a long time before another flash of lightning zigzagged across the sky, and when it did he could see nothing inside the house but the shapeless figure of old Joe, huddled on a couch under a blanket.

Limpy crept carefully around the corner of the house, feeling along the stone wall for a door. He could have gone upright in safety, but he was afraid of the lightning; he did not know in what instant it would illumine the whole countryside.

He found the door, finally, and his hands went slowly over it, feeling, rubbing the smooth surface of the timber until he had found the knob. Then he raised himself slowly and rapped.

There was no answer.

He rapped again, and after a moment he heard old Clubfoot Joe scuffling across the room. He heard the old man fumbling with the knob and then there was silence for a moment.

"Who is it?"

Limpy made no reply. He rapped again, softly. In a few moments what he had been counting upon happened. Clubfoot Joe's curiosity got the better of him; he could not resist the temptation to see who it was that knocked on his door at midnight.

Limpy heard the bolt drawn and the old man slowly turning the knob, and as the door began to open he flung it wide. The next instant he was in the room, and with a single movement had slammed the door and thrown the bolt.

HE stood with his back to the door, water dripping from him in little rivulets, watching Clubfoot Joe as the old man crouched before him, holding aloft the oil lamp which he had lighted when he crawled from beneath his blanket to open the door. Clubfoot Joe was a repulsive figure; he was old and dirty and unkempt, his clothing was in rags, but when he spoke his voice was soft and rich and his diction good.

"So!" he said. "You got away!"

It was not a question; it was just a statement of fact. He stood regarding Limpy with mild interest; he did not seem to be surprised that a half-naked man had rapped on his door at midnight.

"Yes," said Limpy. "I got away. I got to get some clothes. Who else is here?"

Old Joe eyed him curiously for a moment, then moved to the table and set down his lamp.

"Nobody," he said. "Sit down."

"Don't try to put anything over on me, I got to get away."

"Sit down," said the old man. "What could I do to you? Lots of the boys come here when they get away. They'll be after you in a minute."

"I know it," said Limpy hoarsely. "I got to get some clothes."

"You got some time yet. You're

all right until the whistle blows. They'll blow it as soon as they find out you're gone. How'd you get away?"

"I slipped out of the supper line," Limpy explained, "and ducked into a cell. Then I climbed the cell block, punched a hole in the foor and slid down a telephone wire onto a dock. I wrapped my shirt around my hands, but the wire cut hell out of them."

"Dangerous," commented old Joe. "One of the boys got away like that a year ago. He didn't come here, but I read about it in the papers. Looks like they'd had sense enough to take down the wire."

"It's a hard job," said Limpy. "I guess they thought nobody else would try it."

"They ought to know you boys would try anything. Sit down and I'll make you some coffee."

Limpy moved over to a corner of the fireplace and stood wearily watching suspiciously as the old man pottered about the rickety wood stove in a corner. But in a few moments the soothing aroma of coffee expanded his nostrils, and he drew a chair to the table and fell to, drinking the scalding coffee in great gulps and munching voraciously at a loaf of bread. It had not been long since he had eaten, but his exertions had made him hungry.

"What's your name?" old Joe asked suddenly.

"Harry Malone."

"Limpy Malone!" exclaimed the old man. "I read about you. You killed a man. It was a good case. You got a lot of newspaper write-ups; a fine lot of notices."

LIMPY paused with a cup of coffee halfway to his mouth.

"What do you know about notices?" he asked curiously.

"I used to get a lot of good ones," sighed old Joe. "I was an actor."

"So was I," said Limpy.

"You were in the show business?" The old man was eagerly curious, excited. "I played Uncle Tom and Mr. Hyde. You know, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I got a lot of fine notices."

"I played those," said Limpy. "I played everything.'

"I never got to Broadway," sighed Clubfoot Joe, "but I was pretty good. I was the lead one year in a stock company out West."

"Yes?" said Limpy. "I played burlesque, on the road. Character stuff. I played Mr. Hyde every night for a whole season, and matinees. Just a bit, but it was pretty good."

"It's a great part," agreed old Joe. "I liked to play it. Most of my notices were about the way I played Mr. Hyde. I got a lot about Uncle Tom, though."

"You could play Mr. Hyde without make-up now," said Limpy.

"I know," said old Joe sadly. "I'm old now, and down. But I wouldn't" —he added fiercely—"I wouldn't play anything without make-up. It's—it's——"

"Sure. I know. It's no good. What did you quit for?"

"I got hurt," said old Joe. "I got my foot hurt and I couldn't go on any more, so I had to quit the show business. Then I fooled around, one thing and another, and finally I came up here. My people owned this place, so I came here. I've been here a long time. I see you've got a gimp, too. How'd you get it?"

"Railroad wreck near Chicago," said Limpy. "I had to quit the show business, too."

"I wish I could get back," said the old man.

"So do I. If I hadn't got hurt I bet I'd made Broadway. I was pretty good."

"I'll bet you were." Old Joe sighed. "Sometimes I make up and fool

around in here by myself, but I don't get any notices."

"No curtains, either," said Limpy.

"Nothing," said old Joe. "I miss them."

"Sure you do!" Limpy got to his feet. "How about some clothes? I got to get some clothes and get started."

"Sit down!" urged the old man. "You've got time yet. They haven't blown the whistle. That's the first thing they do."

"I know," said Limpy. "I've heard it." He sat down reluctantly. "Say, I used to play——"

"Let me show you my notices," interrupted old Joe.

He hurried to his couch and came back staggering under the weight of a metal box. He flung open the lid and dragged out an old scrapbook, with newspaper clippings pasted to yellowed pages, dirty and torn from much handling.

"Say!" said Limpy eagerly. "You have got everything! You have got a whole Mr. Hyde in here!"

"Sure!" said old Joe, happily, rummaging delightedly among his treasures, grateful to his gods for this kindred soul come out of the bleak grayness of the prison. "I put it on once in a while and fool around. I played Chicago in that Prince Albert."

"Chicago!" There was a touch of awe in Limpy's voice. "You must have been good."

"I was pretty good," agreed old Joe.

"I'd like to play Mr. Hyde again," said Limpy. "I used to bring down the house with that."

"So did I," said old Joe. "Look what this critic in New Orleans——" He suddenly straightened his bent shoulders. "Say, Limpy! Do your Mr. Hyde for me! Put this stuff on and do it like you used to!"

LIMPY fingered the Prince Albert, feeling the texture of the cloth, and let his hand slide caressingly along a greasy, dirty white wig that old Joe had taken from the box.

"I haven't got time," he said. "I got to get some clothes and get started. They'll be after me."

"They haven't blown the whistle yet!" objected the old man. "Go ahead! Do your Mr. Hyde. I haven't seen anybody do that for years! I'll give you some clothes and a boat to get across the river."

He pleaded, and Limpy wavered. The temptation was too great. He could not resist the call of the grease paint. He had been an actor, and an actor in spirit he would always be; he would be like old Clubfoot Joe, never so old that he would not miss the notices, and the gilt and glamor of the show business, and the gasps and applause that had greeted his portrayal of the monstrous Mr. Hyde. He reached into the box and drew out a mirror and a small case of make-up.

"I'll do the bit where Mr. Hyde comes on and goes raving about looking for somebody to choke. That's what I used to do. I was pretty good, but I'll be rusty now."

"That's all right," said old Joe eagerly. "Go ahead! You've got plenty of time."

And so Limpy set to work. He had never been a great actor; he had never been a good actor, but he knew make-up. That is the one thing that a character actor in a burlesque show has to know, for that is his art.

He worked rapidly, and as he put on the Mr. Hyde make-up he transformed himself into the living image of the old man who sat regarding him delightedly from across the table, for he had spoken the truth when he said that old Joe could play Mr. Hyde without make-up.

"Great!" approved old Joe. "Great! Go ahead!"

Limpy picked up a stick from the fireplace, a heavy piece of firewood, and stepped behind the table.

"I'll come on from here," he said, and slouched into the center of the room, his head hanging, his eyes glaring viciously, and his fingers clawing at an invisible victim, while old Joe got to his feet and with vociferous handclapping gave him the first applause he had heard in many years.

It was music to his soul, his heart swelled, and instead of old Joe he saw a huge and approving theatre audience. He lost himself in his part; he crouched forward and began.

"Where is he?" he cried, in the hoarse voice that he had always used when he played Mr. Hyde. "Where is he? Where——" and then he stopped. And old Joe stopped also.

The weird, hooting wail of the prison siren was on the air, shrieking that a convict had won his way out of that place of stone and steel. And Limpy knew that in a few moments automobiles filled with keepers, each man armed with a rifle, would whirl through the gates of the prison and go coughing and plowing through the mud of the country roads. State Troopers would take to their horses and their motorcycles, and all up and down the railroad tracks the telegraph wires would be singing with the news.

And then, after a time, the whistle was still, and all about the house was still, save for the howling of the wind and the patter of the rain on the roof. And in the old house two men stood staring at each other, torn from their world of make-believe by the hooting of the great siren.

"You've got time yet," said old Joe, but his voice trembled. "You——"

"Damn you!" shrieked Limpy. "You kept me here too long!"

In a sudden, furious burst of rage he lashed out with his stick a downward, sweeping blow into which he put every ounce of his strength. He struck the old man on the head, and Clubfoot Joe went down, his gasp of terror choked in his throat.

LIMPY stared at him stupidly, and then an idea slowly gathered form and substance in his mind. He had made up to look like the old man; why not be Clubfoot Joe? He could not leave the house now; by the time he found clothing to wear the whole countryside would swarm with guards and State Troopers, and he would be caught before he had gone a mile. But he felt that if they came to the old house, as they probably would in their search for him, he might be able to deceive them.

It seemed to be his only chance, and one worth taking.

But he would have to hurry. He seized a blanket from old Joe's couch and hurried to the window, where he covered the glass and stuffed the cloth into corners and crevices, until he was satisfied that no betraying gleam of light could filter through.

Then he dumped old Joe's costumes into the big box, kicked the old man's pitiful scrapbook into the fireplace, and shoved the box under the couch. He changed clothing with the still figure on the floor, putting on his own body the ragged trousers and the dirty shirt old Clubfoot Joe had been wearing, and forcing his feet into a pair of shambling, run-down slippers. This done, he extinguished the light.

He went to the door and opened it, cautiously. He stood for a moment, looking and listening, but he could see nothing in the darkness, and he could hear nothing but the barking of a dog far down the road. The darkness was so intense that he suddenly grew afraid.

Stepping quickly inside the old house and closing the door, he lighted the lamp and examined himself carefully to make sure that he had omitted

no detail of make-up, then compared himself in the mirror with the old man who lay silent upon the floor. He felt that he was ready to face the test, confident that no one, except perhaps in the glare of sunshine into which he did not intend to go, could see that he was not Clubfoot Joe.

But he still had to dispose of the old man.

He did not stop to see if old Joe was dead; he would kill him, eventually, anyway. What he had to do now was to get the body out of the way, so that there would be nothing suspicious if the State Troopers or the prison keepers came.

He thought of shoving it into the fireplace and covering it with rubbish, but he was afraid. It was chilly outside; if the troopers came they might want a fire to dry their clothing, and he could not refuse to light one.

So he dragged the old man into the smaller room at the back of the house, into which he had not yet gone. This chamber was smaller than the other and had but one window, so high from the ground that no one could see it from the outside. The floor was of flagstones set into the earth and joined with mortar. It was covered with odds and ends of furniture, pieces of chairs and tables and dressers piled into an indiscriminate mass, covered with the accumulated dirt and grime of years.

Limpy attacked the trash and rubbish, intending to burrow into it until he had cleared a space large enough to hide the old man. But beneath the top of an old dresser he found an iron ring, and traced the outline of a trapdoor set into the stone floor. He knew at once that it must open into a cellar, an ideal place for his purpose.

Working swiftly, he at length had cleared the whole of the door. It was small, not more than three feet long and two feet wide, but it was of iron and all his strength was required to raise it.

When he had finally lifted it a black hole yawned at him, a well of darkness in which there was no trace of light. But Limpy did not stop now to investigate. He dragged the body of the old man to the edge of the hole and then, as an afterthought, found a rag and stuffed it into his victim's mouth, securing it behind his head. Then he tilted the body and shoved it into the hole. After it he tossed the stick with which he had struck the old man.

Scraping a litter of dirt and trash over the floor, Limpy put back the furniture over the iron slab, and then shuffled into the large room, imitating old Clubfoot Joe's shambling gait. He extinguished the light and took the blanket down from the window. He stood there a moment, his face pressed against the glass, but he could neither see nor hear anything. He finally left the window and lay down, carefully, so that he would not disarrange his make-up.

IT was two o'clock in the morning when Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry of the State Police knocked at the door. Limpy was awake. He had been awakened by the sound of their footsteps as they came down the gravel walk.

He had made no movement as they walked around the old house, though he had seen their shadows against the window as they peered through the glass, the beam of their electric torch creeping about inside the old house like a searching finger. His eyes had closed and he had feigned sleep as the light rested for a moment on his head as he lay in the huddle beneath old Joe's blankets.

And now they had knocked. He

wondered if they had seen anything suspicious, if he had left anything that was not Clubfoot Joe's lying around. He felt certain that he had not, but he could not be sure. Anyway, he had to let them in. He waited until they had knocked a third time, and then, with their knuckles still thudding against the door, he got out of bed.

"Open the door, Joe," he heard Sergeant Peck say. "We want to talk to you."

Limpy shuffled across the room to the table and lighted the oil lamp. He could not tell if his nap had disarranged his make-up; but he did not dare look into a mirror. He could only hope that it had not. He shambled across the room, adopting old Joe's gait for the benefit of anyone who might be watching him through the window, and put his hand on the knob. Then hesitated for a moment.

"What do you want?" he cried.

"State Police, Joe," said Sergeant Peck. "Open up."

Limpy slid back the bolt and flung the door open. The test had come and he might as well face it now as any other time. He mumbled grouchily as Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry walked into the house, shook the rain from their hats and coats and crossed to the fireplace.

"You let me alone," said Limpy. "I haven't done anything."

"We're not after you, Joe," said Sergeant Peck. "We're looking for a bird that got out of Sing Sing tonight. Seen anything of him?"

"I haven't seen anybody," said Limpy. "You let me alone."

"Nobody's going to bother you," said Peck impatiently. "But we're going to stay here and get warm and you're going to cook us up some coffee. So get busy."

He leaned forward and struck a match on the mantelpiece, and Limpy's heart almost turned over as he saw the flame applied to the pile of rubbish in the fireplace.

How fortunate that he had not hidden the body of old Joe there! Nothing could have kept them from discovering it. Surely the gods were good to him; his luck was marvelous. His relief was so great that his voice broke suddenly and trailed off into a choke.

"Caught cold, Joe?" asked Sergeant Peck sympathetically. "Well, I don't wonder."

"Rotten weather," said Terry.

They drew two of old Joe's ramshackle chairs to the fireplace and seated themselves, spreading their hands to the fire, exulting in the soothing warmth.

"Hurry up with the coffee, Joe," said Peck.

"I haven't got any coffee," said Limpy grumpily.

"Joe, you're an old grouch. You've just been making some. Where do you keep it?"

But Limpy did not reply. He stood in the centre of the room, unkempt, dirtier even than old Clubfoot Joe had ever been, and watched fearfully while Sergeant Peck rummaged among the pots and pans on the old cook stove. Peck finally turned with the coffee pot in one hand and a can of coffee in the other.

"Here," he said, "get busy and cook it up. We're cold."

MUMBLING and grumbling complainingly, Limpy set to work to rekindle the fire in the stove. He did it, finally, and tended the coffee in fear and trembling, knowing that the one thing of which he must be afraid was the heat that might melt the grease paint on his face. But at last it was ready and he poured it into two tin cups which Sergeant

Peck had found and put on the table. They drank their portions at a gulp.

"Fill 'em up again," said Sergeant Peck.

Limpy shambled across the room to the stove and picked up the pot. He started back with it.

It was then that he saw Sergeant Peck looking at his feet.

"How's your foot, Joe?" asked the Sergeant. "Getting any better? How'd you hurt it, anyway?"

Limpy hunched his shoulders as he had seen old Clubfoot Joe do.

"None of your damned business!" he cried, his voice rising in a shrill burst of rage. "You let me alone."

"Don't be such a grouch, Joe," said Peck conciliatingly. "I'm sorry for you, that's all. Pour out the coffee."

Limpy poured the coffee and then turned to carry the pot back to the stove. And as he crossed the room he knew that Sergeant Peck, and Trooper Terry, also, were looking at his feet. He could almost feel their stares.

He began to wonder what was wrong with his feet. Why should they stare at him? How well did these men know old Joe? He crossed to the fireplace and stood in the shadow at the side of the leaping flames, a cringing, uncouth figure.

But still Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry stared at his feet.

Limpy suddenly became very nervous. He wanted to scream at them; he wanted to ask them why they stared at his feet. He racked his brain to recall what he had done that was wrong, for plainly they were suspicious. And it was something about his feet that had made them so. The temptation to ask them was almost overpowering. And then, suddenly, he knew what it was, and his whole brain burned with the knowledge.

He must be limping on the wrong foot!

BUT was he?

Which foot did old Clubfoot Joe limp on?

It was his own left foot that had been injured, and he had thought that it was the left foot that the old man favored. But now he was beginning to doubt.

Had he been wrong? Was it the right foot that old Joe limped on, or was it the left?

He strove with all the power of his mind to create a picture of the old man as he had seen him clumping about this room. He succeeded, and saw old Joe limping on his left foot. He smiled happily, but the smile faded when on top of this vision came another of the old man shambling across the room, limping on his right foot!

He was in torment as vision after vision floated across his mind, with the old man limping on a different foot each time. In his heart was stark fear.

These damned policemen! They were suspicious, but they were not sure. They were trying to trick him into saying something or doing something that would betray him, and make him tell what had become of old Joe. The fact that they did not know where Joe was, he felt, was all that kept them from pouncing upon him. If he could only remember which foot the old man had limped on! If he had only been more observant and had noticed which of old Joe's feet had been injured before he pitched the body into that black hole beneath the trapdoor in the other room.

He glared at the two troopers as he thought old Joe would have done; mumbled at them, and grumbled because they drank the coffee,

but all the time he was conscious that they were staring at his feet.

He was afraid to move, afraid that old Joe had limped on his right foot, and he could not do that very well.

So he shrank against the fireplace, keeping in the shadows, and mouthed his fear and resentment. His head was nearly bursting and he felt that if they did not go away he would go insane!

What business was it of theirs what foot old Joe limped out—an old broken down actor, an old codger that nobody in the world had any use for, and who was good for nothing?

Limpy tensed his muscles as Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry got to their feet and came slowly across the room to the fireplace.

He would not surrender. The minute they put a hand to him he would fight, but he wanted to hold onto his plan as long as possible, and still retained enough composure to realize that, while they might be suspicious, they were not certain.

But he did not want them to see him walk any more; at any minute they might remember clearly which foot old Joe favored, and if it was the right foot, that was the end.

But they didn't touch him. They put on their hats and their slickers, and then they slid back the bolt and opened the door.

The rain came beating into the old house, and the wind whisked the flame of the oil lamp until it fluttered and was extinguished.

And now Limpy crouched by the fireplace, back in the shadows, his fingers gripping the poker which he had seized the instant the light went out. He waited, but they did not rush him. He saw them as they stood on the threshold, black, sinister shadows, and he heard Sergeant Peck say:

"Sorry we had to bother you, Joe. Much obliged for the coffee! If that bird that got away comes around here let us know."

"You let me alone!" screamed Limpy. He tried to imitate the voice of old Joe, but even as he spoke he knew that he had failed; nothing came from his throat but a frightened croak.

"Better do something for that cold, Joe," said Peck, closing the door.

LIMPY heard their footsteps crunching the gravel. He waited a moment, and then he heard nothing. They had reached the road. Either that, or they had left the path, circled back on the grass and were somewhere about the house.

Perhaps they would make him think they had gone, and then they would creep back and watch him through the window, hoping that he might betray himself. Perhaps they thought he might go to where the body of the old man was hidden, and then they would rush in and capture or kill him.

And that was what he was going to do. He was going to where the old man was, but they were not going to see him, because they could not look through the small window high up in the back room. He would fool them there.

And he had to see the old man again. He had to see which of old Joe's feet had been hurt, so he would know how to limp. He felt that he might be able to trick them if he knew beyond doubt which foot the old man favored when he walked.

So he crept on his hands and knees across the room and through the doorway into the chamber at the back of the house. He did not take the lamp, and there were no matches in his pocket. But though he was horribly afraid, he did not

think of these things. He did not want any light, because he did not want the troopers, if they were watching at the window, to know that he had been in the other room. He could tell by feeling which of old Joe's feet had been hurt.

Poking around in the rubbish, he found the ring of the trapdoor and at length he had cleared the door and raised it. He peered down into the awful blackness, and presently thought he heard a scratching sound, but, after listening intently and not hearing it again, he decided that he had been mistaken.

He leaned far over the edge of the opening, but all he could see was blackness; and though he was afraid of such utter darkness, he had to go down there; he had to see the old man.

Gripping the edges of the floor, he lowered himself carefully, intending to stand on the bottom of the hole, with one hand clutching the floor of the room above, and feel about with his feet until he had found the body of old Clubfoot Joe. But the hole was deeper than he had thought. He could not touch bottom. He could not touch anything, not even when he kicked off old Joe's slipper and extended his toes.

And there he was, hanging from the edge of the trapdoor, with a black hole beneath him, and he did not know its depth. If he dropped, how was he going to get back?

He suddenly became terrified. He could not let himself down into that darkness, and in a little while he began to see horrible things that might be down there. Great rats ran across the mirror of his mind, serpents glided into his consciousness and he began to mumble in stark terror.

Then he tried to pull himself back into the room overhead—kicked and struggled, and every moment he felt his hold growing weaker.

And then suddenly he saw the trapdoor descending!

It fell slowly at first, then faster. He had shaken it with his struggles, and it was coming down to close him up in that black hole with the old man whose head he had beaten with a stick. He knew that nothing he could do would stop the door. In another instant it would crush his fingers.

With a choking, frightened intake of breath, he let go and dropped. The door came down with a dull closing. And with it came the darkness of the pit.

LIMPY fell in a heap on soft earth. He scrambled to his feet and stood panting with fright and despair.

There was nothing anywhere but darkness, so intense that it made his eyeballs ache. He stood on tiptoe and, reaching upward, he found that he could brush the tips of his fingers against the bottom of the door.

But this was worse than if it had been entirely out of his reach because he could not obtain leverage enough to raise the iron slab. Then he reached out on every side as far as he could, and touched nothing but darkness. So, with a sick dread in his throat, he dropped to the ground and sat with his hands hugging his knees.

He felt that his end had come, for there was nothing that he could do to help himself, no way that he could get out. And presently he began to cry and to wish that he had never got out of prison. He had not known when he was well off. In prison he had three meals a day and a place to sleep. Here he had nothing but blackness and silence, and the promise of death.

Suddenly he became conscious

that something was near him. It was creeping upon him out of the ghastly blackness. It breathed hoarsely, as if gasping for life. He listened, trembling, trying vainly to pierce with his eyes that impenetrable wall of darkness. He could feel hideous creatures gliding silently all about him; phantoms of horror flashed before his eyes as he waited.

Something was on his arm, creeping slowly upward toward his head. It felt cold and terrible. He did not know what it was, and he did not have the courage to seize it and find out. But he knew when he felt fingers clutching at his throat, and when he felt the sharp wind of a gasping breath on his face.

It was Clubfoot Joe. The old man was not dead, and he had tracked Limpy in the darkness of the cellar by the sound of his whimpering and his movements, and now the old man's fingers were about his throat, were trying to strangle him to death.

All of this came to Limpy in a rush of thought. He squirmed and twisted, and finally he was free. A dark shadow loomed in front of him, a shadow darker even than the blackness that enveloped him like a pall. He struck at it, and his fists hit solid flesh.

He lunged forward, and he and old Clubfoot Joe flung themselves upon each other like wild beasts. They fought like wild beasts, too, there in that black hole beneath the stone floor of the old house. But they made no outcry. They fought silently except for their grunts and the shrill whistle of their breathing.

It did not last long. Clubfoot Joe was too old and his heart was none too good.

"I guess you'll stay dead now, damn you!" said Limpy at last in a hoarse, croaking whisper that set up a hundred echoes.

He sat on the soft earth beside the old man's body, panting from his exertions.

Now he *had* to get away. Clubfoot Joe was dead and there was no longer any question about what would happen if he, Limpy was caught.

He had to open the door that was somewhere above his head in the stifling blackness that bore down upon him like a suffocating cloak.

It was so dark that he could not see the man with whom he had been fighting; could not see his hand even when he rubbed his palm against his face.

A TERROR more dreadful than anything he had ever imagined gripped Limpy then. Dreadful things began to circle the edges of his mind, dipping their clutching talons into his brain, dragging out events in his miserable life and chuckling over them. Ghastly visions flashed before his eyes as he sat beside the old man he had choked to death. And then suddenly he knew that there were other things in this hole beside himself and Clubfoot Joe. He could feel their presence, he could almost see them as they circled about him in the darkness, awaiting their turn.

Something raced over his legs and he felt the rush of its body as it dashed over him. He knew what it was. A rat.

In a moment they were all about him. He could feel them against his body, jostling and crowding him, timidly at first and then brazenly, without fear. He put out his hand, and it touched something furry, something that turned on him with a squeal and a sharp snap of teeth. He could almost see the glare of the thing's eyes, and, ere long his mind envisaged a circle of rats sitting all about him, edging closer and closer,

waiting for the moment when he had become weak and they would dare to rush him.

He was horribly afraid, and he felt that he would give anything in the world to be back in prison, behind the steel bars, safe from these awful things that sat in the darkness waiting their moment. He got to his hands and knees. There must be a way out of this dreadful place. It had been a cellar; of that he was certain. So there surely was a door to the outside, or something somewhere that he could stand on while he shoved against the trapdoor over his head.

He began crawling about on his hands and knees, while in front of him and behind him, and all around him, were sudden little flurries of sound as the rats made way for him and closed in behind him.

It was like a funeral cortege; he could hear the soft patter of their feet as they followed him, stopping when he stopped, coming on again when he resumed his awkward, shambling crawl. He shambled along with a hand out before him, testing, searching for the wall. And at last he found it, at Clubfoot Joe's feet.

Limpy crawled over the old man into the darkness. At first he tried to go upright, on both feet, but the rats ran between his legs and brushed against him. Twice he fell, and each time he could hear the sharp hiss of their breathing as the rats dodged his falling, plunging body.

Twice they rushed him as he lay prone, getting his breath; he drove them away with frightened sweeps of his hands, whimpering and whining in fear; then fell to crawling again, pushing forward into the blackness that was so thick it almost strangled him, keeping a hand and the side of his body against the wall. And he finally came to something that lay on the floor. He touched it.

It was the body of Clubfoot Joe.

He had gone in a circle; completed the circuit of the hole and he had found no opening, no means of escape.

He could not even find the trapdoor; the darkness above his head was as dense as the darkness that was all about him.

When he rose to his feet and stood shuddering in dreadful terror, the rats ran about his feet and squealed. He felt their sharp teeth sink into his ankles, and he suddenly dropped to his hands and knees and began to crawl in an aimless shamble, crying and whimpering, throwing out his hands and arms, kicking with his feet to keep away those horrible things that came closer and closer.

He went on and on, moaning and whimpering in fright, crawling. . . .

IT WAS the next morning when Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry came again to the old stone house. They brought a can of coffee to give to the man who, even if unwillingly, had given them a hot drink when they needed it. They knocked at the door, and when there was no answer they went to the window and peered in. The room looked as they had left it the night before.

They went around to the door again and broke the lock with a few thrusts of their shoulders. Inside they called for old Joe, and then they went into the back room and stood gazing at the trash that littered the chamber. But suddenly Sergeant Peck, delving into a pile of rubbish, saw Trooper Terry stiffen.

"Listen!" said Terry.

They heard a sound, such a curious sound that they were never able to describe it. It was like a dog panting, and it was like, too, a man scrambling over a plowed

field; they could hear the soft plop of the earth clods. And then they heard words, uttered in a high, whimpering voice:

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"Where is that coming from?" asked Sergeant Peck.

Terry pointed to the floor, and Sergeant Peck looked down. He saw the iron ring of the trapdoor, and they bent and raised the sheet of iron. They looked down into the hole beneath the floor, and in the dim light that came in from the high window they saw Limpy Malone scrambling about on his hands and knees, crawling and falling, getting up and going on, rocking from side to side with fatigue, but always moving in a shambling crawl.

His clothes were torn, his hair was snow white and he was covered with dirt and filth. And all around him were the eager, grayish shapes of rats. Sergeant Peck and Trooper Terry called to him, but he paid no attention; just went on crawling and scrambling, now and then throwing out his hands to sweep the rats from his path. And frequently he cried:

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Sergeant Peck swept the beam of his flashlight into the hole. The rats cowered and backed away from the light, but Limpy Malone kept on crawling, his head hanging loosely, shambling from side to side, muttering and mumbling and calling on God. He crawled over the body that lay huddled against the wall, and over a heavy stick and a greasy white wig that, curiously enough, seemed always to be getting in his way.

The troopers called again, and when Limpy still paid no attention to them Sergeant Peck jumped into the hole. Limpy fought him, breaking away with unexpected strength, and every time he was loose he dropped to his hands and knees and resumed his dreadful crawl about the hole. But finally Sergeant Peck got handcuffs on his wrists and manacled his hands behind his back, and then he lifted the struggling figure high enough for Terry to drag him through the trapdoor.

And then they brought up the body of Clubfoot Joe.

Limpy struggled fiercely when Sergeant Peck and Terry tried to carry him into the front room, and finally he got out of their hands and squirmed and twisted to the floor. He mumbled hoarsely and tried to crawl, but he could not, because his hands were handcuffed behind his back. He fell forward on his face, moaning and whimpering in terror.

Then suddenly he screamed.

For in that instant there had flashed into his crazed brain the realization that he was helpless, that he could not crawl—and the rats had come.

He was dead before the troopers could pick him up.

SERGEANT PECK looked down at the quiet figure.

"He's that convict that got away the other night," he said.

He pointed to Limpy's feet.

"That shows how little care they take in sending out descriptions," he went on. "They told us this man's right foot was crippled, and it's his left."

"The same as old Joe," said Terry.

"Yes," said Sergeant Peck.

A Word to Contributors

AS announced on page 2, this is the first number of Mystery Magazine in its new dress, and as every one knows the first issues of any magazine, are to some extent experimental. But there is nothing experimental in mystery as an interest-arousing medium in fiction. Mystery stories, written and unwritten, are as old as the world.

It has, however, become a kind of habit, particularly among writers, to define the mystery story as a fiction that must neccessarily have to do with detectives and crime and jewels of fabulous price that have gone astray through no fault of their own. And I'd like, here and now, to spike that particular definition of the mystery story so that Mystery Magazine will not read as if it were an extract from the annals of the Tombs or Scotland Yard. Naurally, I want a fair proportion of detective or crime stories that have a generous element of mystery in their make-up; but I want the other kind, too—all kinds of the other kind.

When Columbus discovered America, he solved a mystery. And he did this through the medium of a great adventure. However, the story of Columbus and his quest for a new continent would hardly make an acceptable mystery story to-day because we know in advance what he found. But there are other quests and adventures which legitimately come under the head of mystery; quite as legitimately as the average detective story might be classified as a story of adventure.

Also, there are mystery stories without an ounce of adventure or criminal action in them; humorous stories, stories of the occult, of Far Eastern mysticism, of everything and anything that is or has been mysterious since Time began.

In short, Mystery Magazine hopes to establish itself as a medium for thoroughly well-written, well-built stories that depend in great part upon mystery for their major appeal.

THE EDITOR.

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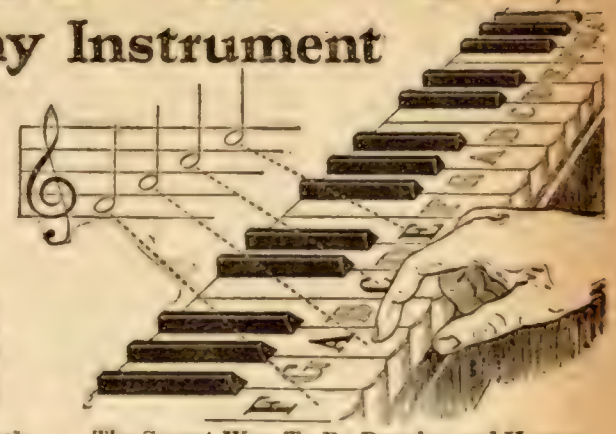

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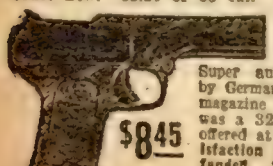

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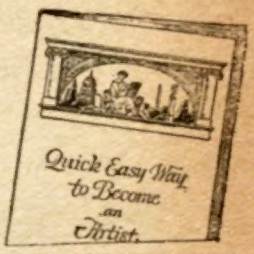

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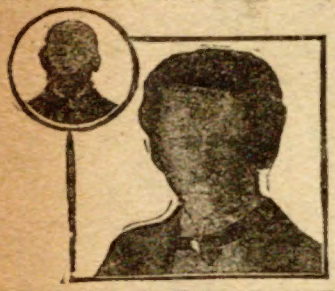

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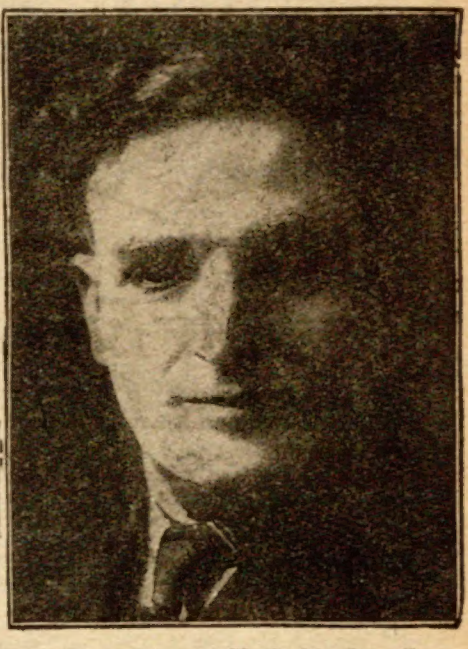

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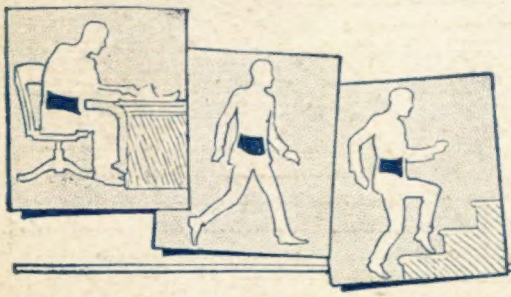
SPECIAL TRIAL OFFER!

Write at once for full description and details of the Special 10 day trial offer being made by The Weil Company, 1161 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.



As illustrated at the left, every move of your body, walking, climbing stairs—merely breathing as you sit—causes the Weil Belt to massage your abdomen. It is working for you every second.

THE WEIL COMPANY
1161 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.

GENTLEMEN—Please send me, without obligation, complete description of the Weil Scientific Reducing Belt and also your special 10-day trial offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....*State* .....